

March 21, 2021

Our gospel readings have been skipping around a little bit... Here in chapter twelve, Jesus has returned to Jerusalem, and this is the beginning of John's version of the passion.

The lesson starts out in a rather strange way. A couple of people, Greeks or foreigners, want to talk with Jesus and instead of talking with him directly, they start by asking Phillip, who then asks Andrew, and then together they go ask Jesus. A long string of intermediaries...

And when they finally get to Jesus, we have a response that hardly seems like an answer. In fact, it's probably better understood as a sermon.

It begins with, "The hour has come." We hear about a grain of wheat that dies in the ground and consequently sprouts and bears much fruit. We hear about the Father glorifying Him, and that the ruler of this world will be driven out, and ends with "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

In other words, the answer to the Greeks, is not only yes, it is yes to everyone. It is Jesus, himself, who will be available and without any intermediaries... From the cross, Jesus, will draw all people to himself.

This morning I'd like to do a little reflecting with this idea of Jesus drawing people to himself

Quick story... It was about twenty years ago; I was at work at the Shepherd's Center and I had a lot of chest discomfort-- it felt tight and was very painful... My co-worker was really concerned and suggested I go to the emergency room. I kept denying that anything was wrong.

Finally, she convinced me to call Kris... She was off that day, and she picked me up in Cannon and brought me to the emergency room at Regina in Hastings. They immediately had me on a heart monitor and were drawing blood. And gave me some pain meds...

One of the tests showed a rhythm abnormality, and the Doctors seemed particularly concerned. At one point in the emergency exam, I was light-headed and just about fainted. They were concerned and scheduled an angiogram for the next morning. Throughout the night they kept drawing blood and looking for enzymes. Thinking it might be a heart attack. It wasn't... But at the time they were sure it was.

I have one very poignant memory of that whole emergency room episode. Regina is a Catholic hospital, and over each doorway, was a cross with Jesus on it, and extending his arms outward. At one point, I remember looking at that cross, long and hard... My initial reaction, was, "Ohh no, not now, I'm not ready yet!!!" For me, it was not comforting, in fact it was a little disturbing...

But throughout the night, there was something about the image of Jesus on that cross, that got my attention. Once I got past the idea that Jesus was calling me over to the great beyond, I started imagining Jesus himself on the cross. And the

suffering he endured. And I found a connection... Jesus knew personally what suffering was all about. Jesus knew what pain was all about...

And that was significant for me. It seemed that Jesus and I had something in common. It was comforting to realize He knew what I was feeling, knew what I was going through, and I'll tell you, there were some prayers being said. In a very real way, I was drawn to Jesus.

I believe Jesus draws us into relationship. It's not heavy handed, it's not a, "come to me or else," kind of relationship. But rather a gentle knowing presence. A presence of compassion, a presence of understanding, a presence of love and forgiveness. It is a presence of love. And a mystery beyond all knowing.

The other part of this lesson that gets my attention, is that there is no need for intermediaries. Rather than asking someone else about seeing Jesus, Jesus is directly available to all of us. Whether we are in an emergency room, or in a crisis situation, or deep in grief, or just trying to get to sleep, Jesus is with us.

God doesn't promise us an easy life, God promises to be with us, and especially in all the difficult circumstances of life.

Some of my favorite conversations are with people who've experienced some kind of suffering. There's usually some kind of solidarity with Jesus, some wisdom that is gleaned from those hardships. It's as if Jesus has drawn them to himself, and

they've become a gentle knowing presence. I often see it with older adults. I imagine you've seen it too...

That's the good news for today. Jesus does draw all people to himself... Jesus does understand what it's like to live in our skin. Jesus is the savior of the world... He is just a prayer away... Amen.