

**Christ Episcopal Church**

**2 Emerson Street**

**East Norwalk,**

**Connecticut 06855-1330**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent (B)**

**March 18, 2018**

**DRAFT**

**8 AM and 10 AM homilies**

**by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**“The beginning of the end”**

**The Holy Gospel according to**

**John 12:20-33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who

love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.

Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it

again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Lord has called us, and we are his. Let us serve and adore him. Amen.

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks of his going away, his being "lifted up from the earth", which refers to his imminent crucifixion.

In a world of uncertainty, we want some things we can depend on. That is why many people purchase various kinds of insurance. The Goodfellow insurance company has sold insurance to more than 40,000 people to cover them in case they are abducted or

impregnated by aliens. That package runs about \$400 a year for up to \$1.7 million in coverage.

The Heaven's Gate religious group had purchased alien abduction insurance before their mass suicide in 1997. Their insurance company (London brokerage firm Goodfellow Rebecca Ingrams Pearson (GRIP) suspended sales of alien abduction insurance after the suicide but later resumed sales. The policy has been sold to about four thousand people (mostly in England and the United States). At a cost of roughly \$155 a

year the GRIP policy would pay about \$160,000 to someone who could show that they had been abducted by a being who was not from Earth. The payment would double if the insured person was impregnated during the event. Men were also able to purchase the impregnation insurance for protection against the unknown capabilities of alien technology.[6]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien\\_abduction\\_insurance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_abduction_insurance)

Back in 1999 when fears about Y2K were rampant, around 15,000 women took out insurance policies to cover themselves in case they were selected to give birth to the Messiah.

<http://www.lectionaid.com/18-2/2c.html>

Jesus uses the analogy of a grain of wheat dying before it could proliferate.

Lutheran pastor Edward Markquart called Dr. David Gibbe who has a Ph.D. in plant physiology and said to Dr. Gibbe: “My name is Pastor Markquart.

I am preaching a sermon about Christ. The key to the sermon is this: Unless a seed dies, it remains a single seed, but if it dies, it produces many seeds and therefore much fruit. Can you tell me what happens when a seed dies?” The professor thought for a moment and finally had the right answer. It helps to have a Ph.D. in plant physiology. He told me that inside every seed is an embryo, and in that embryo is a root which goes down into the ground; and a shoot that goes up into the sky. Every embryo has a root and a shoot; and

inside that little embryo, (and this is really a miracle), there is an 'on' and 'off' switch. I didn't know that seeds have 'on' and 'off' switches. But they do. Every seed has a little 'on' and 'off' mechanism. And when you plant a seed into the ground at 40 degrees for 40 days, that mechanism goes on, but if the temperature is at 20 degrees, the mechanism stays off. There is a miraculous mechanism which goes on and off. Now there is also a thin coat around that seed which protects the seed from oxygen coming in prematurely and

causing germination. When this dormant seed is planted into the ground, for 40 days at 40 degrees, the switch goes 'on' and the seed takes in water and it miraculously begins to expand, and the seed coat is broken, and then it takes in oxygen and begins to mature and produce sugar and protein; and then out comes the little roots and the little shoots, and the shoots produce more seeds which produce more fruit. And that's what happens when a seed dies," said the professor. "It's a miracle."

Thank you, Dr. Gibbe.

Jesus said, “Unless a seed dies, it remains a single seed; but if it dies, it produces many seeds and then much fruit.”

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_b\\_if\\_a\\_seed\\_dies.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_if_a_seed_dies.htm)

St. Francis of Assisi knew this law well when he wrote in his famous prayer for peace; “it is in giving that we receive; it is in dying that we are born again.”

Jesus said, “He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life” (John 12:25). This is a second expression of the divine paradox. Those who love their life will lose it, but those who hate their life will keep it (see also Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; and Matthew 10:39). This is an example of hyperbole—exaggeration for effect. Jesus is not saying that happy people will lose their lives and depressed people will keep them. He is saying that people whose lives are centered on self

will lose them, because the Father in Heaven will not honor them (see v. 26). People whose lives are centered on service to God even at the cost of sacrifice will keep them, because the Heavenly Father will bless them with eternal life.

**“Now there were certain Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast”** (John 12:20). These Greeks could be from Greece or the Decapolis (a group of ten cities near Galilee with large Greek populations).

Given the Passover setting, it is possible that they are Jewish proselytes (circumcised converts to the Jewish faith) who are permitted to participate in Jewish festivals (Exodus 12:45, 48). However, it is equally possible that they are “God-fearers”—uncircumcised Gentiles who worship the God of Israel. In either case, their appearance here hints at the openness that Jesus will have for Gentiles.

This passage is the epiphany of the Gospel according to John, it pivots the

readers' understanding that finally Jesus has broken through the Jewish captivity of the Messiah, Jesus has broken through his sole connection to those who were first Jews and then Christ followers, and these gentile Greeks are a sign to Jesus and to us that the true Messiah was for all of us, Gentile and Jew. Forever.

Throughout the gospel, many people discuss whether Jesus is the Messiah, and the discussions form part of the structure of the first half of John. Early

in the gospel, John the Baptist declares that he is not the Messiah, but that he is preparing the way (John 1:20-23). John the Baptist says it again later, in context to Jesus' ministry eclipsing his, and clearly indicates that Jesus was the Messiah whom he was preparing the way for (3:26-30). John the Baptist pointed his disciples towards Jesus very early in the gospel, and many of them also believed that Jesus was the Messiah (1:41, 49).

Throughout this discussion in the Gospel according to John, Jesus only directly declares himself to be the Messiah once – to the Samaritan woman (John 4:25-26), to one outside the Jewish faith.

The reading in today's Gospel is the last that we hear of the Greeks. They are important to the story, because:

- Their visit illustrates the truth of the Pharisees' statement in the verse just before today's Gospel reading: "Look,

the world has gone after him” (John 12:19).

- The Greeks’ visit prompts Jesus to acknowledge that his hour has come.
- Their visit also prompts Jesus to announce that, when he is lifted up, he will draw “all people” to himself, an obvious reference to Gentiles (including Greeks) (John 12:32).

But with the one exception with the Samaritan woman, Jesus exclusive uses the title, Son of Man, which has the

advantage of having none of the militaristic connotations associated with the title, Messiah. People expected the Messiah to raise an army, to drive out the Romans, and to re-establish the great Davidic kingdom. They have no such expectations regarding the Son of Man.

Jesus' frequent use of the title Son of Man in connection with his passion, however, suggests a veiled messianic title. The title obviously has meaning to Jesus, but the meaning will not be clear to the disciples until after the

resurrection. Son of Man is a unique title used of a divine person prophesied in the Old Testament book of Daniel in Chapter 7, Verses 13 and 14. That text reads: “one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven”. Jesus is probably adopting that title of Son of Man to place in perspective what his role on earth is—the divine man--fully man, but also fully God.

The road to glory is servanthood. That was true for Jesus, and it is true for all who would follow him. Like Jesus,

we are expected to be faithful even unto death and to trust that God will vindicate us.

**“Then there came a voice out of the sky”** (John 12:28b). In this Gospel, there is no account of the Transfiguration, with its voice from heaven. We might think of this incident as perhaps somewhat of the Johannine equivalent.

**“I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again”** (John 12:28c). The

Father responds audibly to the Son's request, assuring the Son that he has glorified the Son and will do so again.

The Father glorified the Son in the Incarnation. The opening verses of this Gospel say, “The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Father also glorified the Son at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36).

The Father will glorify the Son again at the cross and the open tomb—and at the day of his return (Luke 9:26).

A desert in California, Death Valley, in the southwestern part of the United States, is the hottest, driest place in North America and perhaps in the world. The hottest temperature recorded there was 134 degrees Fahrenheit. It is a barren place—dry and brown. It is difficult for plants to live or grow in this desert because it hardly ever rains and

when the rain does come it is a small amount.

In 2005, more rain came to the desert than had happened in over fifty years.

Many times more than the usual rainfall fell upon the desert and when that happened seeds that had been resting (lain dormant) in the desert for all those years began to sprout and grow.

Conditions were just right. There was enough water, sun, and fair temperatures to cause the seeds, which had developed thick coverings, to bloom. Soon there were huge meadows of wildflowers

growing there— beautiful fields of yellow, pink, blue, and purple flowers.

It was a once in a lifetime occurrence.

<http://www.backroadswest.com/images/WildFlwrs/DSCN0906.jpg>

This idea of timing—being just the right time, is talked about in the Bible. Jesus told his disciples, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12:23). He was telling them that everything God had planned for his life had happened, the time was just

right, and soon events would happen that would glorify God.

The writer and narrator of the Alpha videos is the Reverend Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in London. Nicky notes in one of his talks that if one tries to read the Bible randomly, problems could arise. He cites one person who placed their finger haphazardly in a Bible and read the first verse their eyes landed upon.

Unfortunately, the verse was, “And Judas went out and hanged himself.”

Not satisfied with that guiding, they placed their finger into the Bible again and read, “Go and do thou likewise.”

Being somewhat taken aback by this Biblical admonition, the person placed their finger into the Bible a third time and read, “What thou do, do it quickly.”

The Alpha course gives five points of how God guides us. God guides us through commanding Scripture, through a compelling Spirit, by common sense, using the counsel of the saints--other Christians, and by circumstantial signs--five phrases that begin with the letters,

‘c’ and ‘s’--commanding Scripture,  
compelling Spirit, common sense,  
counsel of the saints, and circumstantial  
signs.

A few years ago, I heard this song. It  
spoke to me then. It speaks to me now.

It goes like this,

“Open our eyes, Lord,

we want to see Jesus,

to reach out and touch him,

and say that we love him.

Open our ears, Lord,

and teach us to listen,

open our eyes, Lord,  
we want to see Jesus.”

I always thought that the writer of John’s Gospel skipped a beat somehow when the scene turns from the Greeks wanting to see Jesus to the next comment that Jesus makes that “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. But it is likely that now Jesus recognizes that his work is done—his gospel, Jesus’ Good News has now made it to the farthest limits of the world, as far as Israel is concerned—

Jesus' Good News has finally been spread beyond the borders of Israel, far beyond Samaria, far beyond Tyre and Sidon, all the way to gentile Greece or Greek lands. So, the approach of the Greeks has signaled to Jesus that his work is now completed, and his next move will be his crucifixion. Thus Jesus represents the grain that must die; Jesus is the seed that falls into the earth and dies; Jesus is now at his very end; Palm Sunday was actually completed a few verses before today's lesson, if one reads the preceding verses.

So, Jesus recognizes the appearance of the Greeks as being the quiet signal from his Father who art in heaven, who speaks to him and the others about glorifying God's name. This voice of his father has heralded the end. Jesus now will die in order for the Good News to continue beyond Greece, beyond Rome, beyond Europe, beyond India, and to the rest of the world as we know it. And, finally, once Jesus dies, we too will hear the Good News that Jesus has died for us, for you and for me. Jesus has seen the end of his earthly life, and

he is troubled at the prospect of being “raised up”, “Lifted up” on the hard wood of the cross—lifted up for us.

So, can we see him in our mind’s eye, on the cross, dying for us? Can we recognize Jesus’ sacrifice that will end all sacrifices? He died for us. He died for us.

Next week we will hear the Passion, the death of Jesus on the cross after we read the Palm Sunday gospel. This Sunday’s Gospel is actually after Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. And Jesus’ arrest is imminent. There is

now no going back. Jesus had completed it all, for us, for you and for me. Will we recognize what he has done for us?

In our hearts we know whether we have accepted Jesus or rejected Jesus. In our hearts is where the final answer to God is known. May our answer to God be “Yes”. Yes, Lord, I believe. Yes Lord, I believe your only Son died for me and for us, to save me and us from every sin we have ever done, so that we too will be able to join God in heaven at our end. The work of Christ has been

ended. But our work for Christ is just beginning.

As we said together in Psalm 51,  
Stanzas 12 and 13 just now:

12 “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Amen.

## Description:

Jesus sees the end of his journey on earth as he hears of the coming of the Greeks to find him right after his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, realizing his Good News has begun to spread far beyond the Jewish nation.

His death will be eminent, but the appearance of the Greeks signals that his message of salvation will be for all people.

Tags:

Jesus, Christ, messiah, Son of Man,  
Daniel, divine, Philip, Andrew, believe,  
serve, lifted, raised, crucified, cross,  
Palm Sunday, Samaria, Tyre, Sidon,  
woman, Samaritan, Good News,  
Gospel, Alpha, Reverend Nicky  
Gumbel, Vicar, Holy Trinity Anglican  
Church, London, commanding  
Scripture, compelling Spirit, common  
sense, counsel of the saints,  
circumstantial signs, desert, seed, wheat,  
insurance, Connecticut

**St. Stephen's Episcopal Church**  
**35 S. Franklin Street**  
**Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701**

**The Fifth Sunday of Lent (B):**

**March 22, 2015**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**“We wish to see Jesus”**

**DRAFT**

**The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus**

**Christ according to John 12:20-33**

The Lord has called us, and we are his. Let us come and adore him. Amen.

If Jesus came to Wilkes-Barre, would you want to seek him out?

Are there issues in your life for which you would ask his guidance?

One place some seek guidance today is in the Bible. Our church has readings for each day listed in the back section of the Book of Common Prayer, and the daily reading list and a daily reflection is also published in the Forward Day by Day booklets on the side table near the door to the narthex at South Franklin Street.

And the most widely used Bible study in the Anglican and Episcopal Church is called Alpha. Over twenty

million people in a multitude of denominations have taken the Alpha course since it was first introduced some twenty years ago. The Alpha course has fifteen lessons, and one lesson that is particularly popular gives five points of how God guides us. God guides us through commanding Scripture, through a compelling Spirit, by common sense, using the counsel of the saints--other Christians, and by circumstantial signs--five phrases that begin with the letters, "c" "s"--commanding Scripture, compelling Spirit, common sense,

counsel of the saints, and circumstantial signs.

In a very polite way the Greeks who had come to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem asked one of Jesus' disciples if they could meet Jesus. But why would they want to meet Jesus?

Perhaps they wanted just what we have just outlined. They probably wanted some guidance from Jesus. Wouldn't you want direction from Jesus if you could just walk over to where Jesus was staying? It was quite perceptive of those Greeks to ask Jesus' disciples how

they could get some time to visit with Jesus.

Getting “recharged” is one thing that could hopefully be the result of visiting with Jesus. Our day to day lives need to be enlivened, and our faith needs to be strengthened. I use rechargeable batteries in various home electrical devices--telephones, clocks, television controllers, et cetera. Over time every battery runs down, discharges, whether it is used or not. And it has to be recharged. In similar fashion, our lives, our spiritual lives run down, and they

need recharging regularly. How we go about recharging our spiritual lives is challenging. We go to church. We pray. We read our Bibles during the week. We receive Holy Communion. We visit those who are sick and home bound. We do Christian deeds of mercy and kindness. And these things keep us going spiritually, they recharge us. We also come to see Jesus in all these ways.

We come to see Jesus for direction, through prayer, discussion, seeking discernment.

What issues in your life challenge you at work, home, school, or in retirement? And what is your method of getting help and advice? What do you value most?

In 1845 an expedition set out from England to find the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean across the north Canadian Arctic. Captain John Franklin and 138 men set sail in two three-masted ships amid enormous fanfare. They expected that the journey would take two to three years. But these were the kinds of

things they carried with them: a twelve-day supply of coal, a uniform for each man of Her Majesty's Navy that included only one overcoat for each man. Instead of extra fuel, they carried an organ that played fifty tunes, a twelve hundred volume library, heavy china settings for the men, cut glass goblets, and heavy sterling silver eating utensils engraved with the initials of the family crest of each of the officers.

Two or three months after they set out, a British whaling captain reported back to England that he had seen the expedition

in Lancaster Sound and that the men were in high spirits. He was the last European to see them alive. For twenty years, search parties found well-preserved bodies and skeletons in the frozen Arctic Sea. The captain, John Franklin, apparently died aboard ship. After the ship was frozen into the ice for a winter, the ship's supplies were running dangerously low, and the men evidently decided to walk for help. This was why their bodies were found scattered. There was some evidence that, as they decided to set out from the

ship to walk for help across the Arctic, they took a lifeboat and put in it the organ, some books, some china, some sterling silver flatware, and tried to drag it across the ice with them. They chose to cling to the vestiges and items of their old life, and it killed them.

A retired clergyman and his wife moved to a lovely year-round house on the shore. They had dreamed for fifteen years of living there overlooking the ocean. In the course of one year, the property sustained great damage three times--a hurricane, December storms,

and a March blizzard. They spent so much time and resources repairing their house that they finally realized that they were now working just to sustain the house. They were sacrificing time and energy for what they thought was a dream house, but which turned out to be a nightmare. And they realized that this had really been happening all along.

The house that was supposed to facilitate his retirement was keeping him from doing the things he enjoyed--like doing interim work in parishes around his diocese, like being able to teach and

preach. So, they finally decided to put the house on the market in an effort to simplify their lives. They did not know where God would call them, or when, or if it would coincide with the sale of the house. They only knew that they must let go in order to move on. [Thanks to the Rev. Pamela Mott in Sermon Mall for these two stories.]

Maybe some of the trappings of life have trapped you. You may need to jettison something that is holding you back or pinning you down. You need to seek Jesus and his advice.

God will not lead you to do anything contrary to scripture. The Bible gives instruction on such things as marriage, work, money, children, elderly relatives. But sometimes if not most times scripture will not give you God's particular will. So, you will need to explore further avenues.

God will speak to you as you pray. You may get a good thought, a strong impression, a sense of direction that needs testing. Ask if what you think you should do is loving, strengthening,

encouraging, comforting. Does it bring the peace of God?

If what we seem to be led to do is common-sensical, it should be physically and mentally compatible with our abilities. God is not likely calling us to be computer experts if we have difficulty adding and subtracting. What we seem to be led to do should be spiritually compatible and personally compatible with us as well. It should include our families if we live with ones dependent on us. It should be within the realm of the strength of our faith.

We need to seek out advice of some who are wiser and more experienced than we are. We should consult godly Christians. But the decisions will be our responsibility, not those of others.

Sometimes God closes doors.

Sometimes God opens doors. Watch the circumstances of our lives, but don't put too much weight on them. Sometimes we need to persevere in spite of all the circumstances.

And finally, don't be in a hurry. The history of the great leaders in the Bible often involved waiting, active waiting

perhaps, but patience is a virtue. And remember, we all make mistakes, but God forgives and restores us.

We may be like the Greeks seeking Jesus. We know he has the answers for our lives. We know we have to come to him through those who know him. We know too that we need to approach him in order to know best how to live our lives.

May we come to our Lord and Savior with thanksgiving and gladness of heart. He will guide us. He will save us.

Amen.

