

March 17, 2024

“Unless a Kernel Dies”

John 12:20-26

### **Intro:**

It's hard to believe, but we are only two weeks away from Easter. To me it seems as though February was unusually long, for the shortest month of the year, and March seems to be flying by. As we get closer to Easter, and the passion week, things get even more packed in – from a Biblical perspective. We have Palm Sunday next Sunday, and then right away is Good Friday and Easter Sunday. That doesn't leave a lot of time for us to consider all that happens in the Gospel accounts between the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, and His death and resurrection.

So, this morning as we continue to follow along with the lectionary readings, we are going a bit out order. The passage we are looking at in John 12 happens after the events of Palm Sunday. Where we are picking things up, Jesus has already been anointed in Bethany, arrived in Jerusalem, and if you want to insert Mark's timeline of events, Jesus has cleared the temple. Next week we will be looking back to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the events of Palm Sunday.

### **The Passage:**

So, all of the pomp and ceremony and shouting of the crowds has taken place. And now things really begin in earnest for Jesus and for the disciples. In John's gospel, several chapters are given to the interaction between Jesus and the Twelve. This is preparation for what is to come. Good Friday is going to be a shock. Easter is going to be even more of a shock, but in a good way. Soon after, Jesus will ascend to heaven and His place with the Father, until He comes again. That time is known only to the Father, and so there will be an unknown amount of time where the twelve, and those that come after them as believers in the church, will need to live as faithful followers of Jesus, telling people about who Jesus is and why knowing Him matters. Jesus wants to make sure that they are

well equipped for that work. He knows that His death and resurrection are now imminent, and that is where we enter the story today in the Gospel of John.

The scene is an interesting one. Some Greeks ask to see Jesus. Presumably, they are part of a group of non-Jewish people who were attracted to Judaism, but to this point had not been able to convert. It is likely that they would have attended some synagogue events (from the edges), or made a point of being present for the major feasts and celebrations. Since this story takes place during the feast of Passover, these Greek believers have a reason to be in or near Jerusalem at this time.

It is not known what prompted them to seek out Jesus. Perhaps they had heard of His recent miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. They are at least somewhat familiar with who he is and what he has been up to. Being from the Greek speaking world as opposed to being from Israel, it makes sense for them to speak to Philip before Jesus because Philip's hometown, Bethsaida, was part of the Hellenistic world. Philip is also a Greek name, so they might have assumed he would speak Greek, or he might simply have been a more comfortable person for this Greek delegation to interact with. Whatever the case, they come to Philip to ask for an audience with Jesus. Philip seems to be unsure if they should bother Jesus with this interview request; after all, He does seem preoccupied these days... so he asks Andrew what should be done. Andrew obviously has no problem introducing them to Jesus. And this is the moment we have before us.

This small group, maybe 3-4 people, and Philip and Andrew, are heading over to ask Jesus to answer some questions. It seems like a minor encounter, but their request provides a contrast to the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus. Where the Pharisees are now firmly entrenched in their planning for Jesus' death, these Greek seekers open the gospel vision to the whole world – Jew and Gentile. The Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus is exactly what is needed for those outside of the Jewish faith to be able to accept Him and the forgiveness of sin that He will soon provide.

Their arrival also seems to solidify the appointed time for Jesus' death. It has moved from "there will be a time" to "the hour has come".

The odd thing is that as soon as Philip and Andrew present them and their request for a meet-and-greet with Jesus, we don't find out what they talk about. They fade into the background of John's narrative, having accomplished their purpose there of kick-starting Jesus' teaching about his coming death.

### **The Kernel of Life:**

We have the advantage of reading this account backwards, meaning we know how the story ends. We know that Jesus is going to be crucified. We know that He will be raised from the dead. We know that all of this is necessary for humanity to be given new life and restored relationship with God. But the disciples, and the crowd of people who were listening to Jesus at this time, did not. They need to hear this illustration of the kernel of wheat needing to die. It gives context and the reason for what is about to happen. Jesus' death is necessary. Without it, humanity will not be able to have new life. Sure, it could be argued that each kernel, each life, is important and should not just be thrown away willy-nilly, but as Jesus illustrates, unless that kernel of wheat is sacrificed, there will be no more kernels. Life is given through death. The single kernel is buried in the ground, and while doesn't "die" per se, from it grows a whole new plant with lots of new kernels of wheat on it.

By itself, this illustration would have made sense. But the fact that Jesus now applies this illustration to himself would have been mind-blowing. How is it that one person, through the act of dying, can bring about life for many more people?

And this, my friends, is the wonder and joy of the gospel. Jesus, who because of his love for the Father cared more about people than himself, willingly took on the punishment of death that those people deserved, so that those same humans – which includes you and me, can actually have life. A new and wonderful life that has hope and freedom. A life infused with forgiveness. A new life that is lived in

the full understanding of just how loved and valued we are by the very One who spoke creation into being.

This is the new and beautiful life that is given for us.

**Conclusion:**

The question for us is not whether the gift has been given – Jesus has already given his kernel of life so that our new life may grow. The question is what will you do with this life? One of the options is to shelter and protect it with your whole being. After all, it is precious. But this is not the challenge that Jesus brings. Now that we have received this life He has given, Jesus challenges us to be willing to lose it back to Him.

Let me explain. In some instances, when Jesus says people must lose their life to keep it, this is the potential of a literal losing of life – dying for his sake before they would in the natural course of life. But for most of us, that will not be the case. The question for us is whether we place this new life that Jesus gives as under our ownership and control, or whether we surrender to the ownership and control of the Father, just as Jesus surrendered His life. It might mean that God asks us to move somewhere, or work in some field, or care for someone, or befriend someone, or stand up for something that we would not normally choose. But because we have “lost” our life into the Father’s hands, we do not hesitate to step forward into what is being asked of us.

The question for us today, is have you lost your life, and if so, where is Jesus directing you to be able to “find” it in living for Him?

Let’s pray.