

Hurry Up Please, It's Time

This morning's Gospel brings to mind a line from "The Waste Land" by Anglican poet T.S. Eliot: "Hurry up please, it's time." It's the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, *Sukkot* (סוכות) in Hebrew, a week-long harvest festival commemorating the Exodus. Jerusalem is crammed because, in Jesus's day, Hebrew law requires observant Jews to come to Jerusalem for *Sukkot* and stay in temporary shelters while they worship, pray for rain, and celebrate their liberation from Egypt. It's the last day of the festival, and Jesus has loudly invited anyone who thirsts to come to him for living water. John tells us that some Greeks – presumably, Gentiles – have come to the festival to worship. They approach Philip and ask to see Jesus. Philip corrals Peter's brother Andrew, and they tell Jesus that he has guests. Apparently, the Greeks' arrival was not unexpected. Jesus replies, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," then explains at some length that a single grain of wheat can only yield a bountiful harvest if it's planted in the earth and dies. We can only imagine how Philip and Andrew might have reacted to his response. Grains of wheat. Okay, Lord, that's cool. We get it. You wanna see these Greek guys or not?

"The Waste Land" is widely regarded as one of the most important English language poems of the 20th century. It's beautifully written and all but incomprehensible, a vast stream of consciousness crammed with literary and Biblical references that has challenged English majors and baffled theologians since it was first published in 1922. I couldn't begin to untangle "The Waste Land" in the time we have this morning. But that one line, "Hurry up please, it's time," conveys a sense of urgency that seems particularly *apropos* to our Gospel passage. Something very important is about to happen, and there's no time to waste.

Before we can wonder for even an instant whether something momentous is about to occur, John thrusts us into the midst of a conversation between Jesus and his Father. When Jesus

says, “Father, glorify your name,” a voice from heaven replies, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” This is the same voice that praised Jesus at his baptism, the voice that ordered the terrified disciples to listen to Jesus at the Transfiguration. It’s the voice of Adonai, Creator of the Universe and Lord of All. When that voice speaks, miraculous things happen. Jesus clearly recognizes his Father’s voice. The crowd surrounding him does not. They hear *something*, but most think it’s thunder and the rest think that an angel is speaking with Jesus. He insists that the voice came not for his sake, but for ours. If so, why do we have so much trouble hearing it?

In his 2018 sermon, “This Voice Has Come for Your Sake, Not for Mine,” the Reverend Kirk Allen Kubicek suggests that we can’t hear the Father’s voice because we don’t want to listen to what he has to say. “[C]ouldn’t it be,” Father Kubicek writes, “that we don’t want to hear anything about having to watch [Jesus] die, watch him be executed, the victim of state-sanctioned capital punishment? Dress it up as being like a grain of wheat, call it what you may, but that is what it is: state-sanctioned execution.” Father Kubicek is on to something. Jesus is comfortable with that gigantic, majestic voice, but it’s intimidating for us even when it rings with love at our Lord’s baptism. The idea that the Father comes for our benefit to assure us that Jesus’s Passion will glorify his name is almost too much to take in. This is the omnipotent, omniscient, eternal Creator of All. He already has a throne room in heaven filled with rank upon rank of angels who unceasingly sing his praises. How much glory does any god need? And how does the torture and bloody execution of his Son make his glory any greater?

Admittedly, I’m a profoundly limited creature who can’t begin to fathom God’s grand design. But to me, a God who rescued his beloved Son from the clutches of bloodthirsty mortals would be more glorious than one who allows his Son to be brutalized and murdered by those who, as Jesus himself confirms, “know not what they do.” Where is the glory in that?

God is the source of all glory. He doesn't need us to glorify him. Our loudest prayers and praises, most beautiful hymns, and finest works of sacred art probably sound like nursery rhymes and look like children's scribbles compared to the wonders of heaven. We, on the other hand, very much need to glorify God. Human beings are hardwired to worship, and we can be seriously hurt if we worship the wrong things. The maxim "never meet your heroes" recognizes that if we put anyone up on a pedestal, no matter how decent or deserving they may seem to be, eventually they're going to fall off. And if we worship the things that the "the ruler of this world" has on offer – money, power, fame – we can kiss ourselves and our souls goodbye. Only God – Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit – is glorious enough to be safely worshiped. Anything and anyone else will always disappoint in the end.

And therein may lie the key to finding glory in Jesus's Passion. God has been trying to build a loving relationship with his wayward children from the moment he brought us into being. Unfortunately, humans can be ridiculously difficult to impress. We quickly become accustomed to almost anything and are prone to taking the many good things God gives us for granted. For example, we heard last week how the Israelites complained to Moses about having to eat manna, the divine bread of heaven, as they journeyed through the wilderness. (In fairness, after twenty or thirty years of eating manna for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, we might crave a change, too.) Despite his omniscience, the Father might have been surprised by how finicky his children can be, and frustrated by how quickly our amazement disappears. An ordinary miracle, if there is such a thing, wouldn't sustain humanity's wonder for long. Those who didn't want to follow Jesus were already quick to dismiss his healings, feeding the multitudes, and exorcisms as stage magic or the work of demons. Even returning from the dead might not be enough. But coming back from scourging and crucifixion, the most barbaric capital punishment that the monstrous

Roman Empire could inflict – now *that* might just do the trick. The more Jesus suffers, the more miraculous his resurrection seems, and the more faith it inspires. And that, dear friends, may be where we find the glory – in the healing, not the hurt.

So, when the Father says he will glorify his name, perhaps he really is speaking for our benefit. Perhaps he is promising us that, no matter how horrible Jesus's Passion becomes, God's power to heal and restore is greater still. Through Jesus's sacrifice, humankind will finally appreciate God's power to make even the worst things new. Then, we will glorify God, not out of fear or obligation, but in gratitude and joy.

The Crucifixion is looming especially large for me this year; maybe it is for you, too. Many of you have been going through especially tough times. Difficult as parts of Holy Week can be, however, we mustn't look away from the cross. If we don't look up fearlessly at Jesus in his suffering, we can't fully appreciate the miracle of his resurrection. The deeper the darkness at Golgotha, the brighter the glory of the empty tomb will be.

As for those Greek visitors, Bible scholars have various theories about them. I agree with those who see the Greeks as symbolic of people from outside the Hebrew community who came to worship Jesus. John's Gospel contemplates the establishment of Christianity on a cosmic level; eventually, John believes, every knee will bend. So, when the Gentile Greeks show up at a Hebrew festival asking to see Jesus, he knows that the countdown to begin his mission has started. Their arrival is Jesus's cue to commence his agonizing, glorious work on the cross, defeating the Adversary and drawing all of humanity to himself. Whether they ever got to speak with him or not, the Greeks' arrival tells Jesus that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Everyone, including the good people of St. Luke's Church Eastport, must ready themselves for the greatest miracle that ever occurred. Hurry up please, it's time. Amen.