

New Life

John 12:20-33

Acts 2:1-21

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Good Morning. I have been attending graduation ceremonies for the past few weeks. I was reminded of one I attended a few years ago where outside the building there was a poster containing two pictures. Obviously the mother of a graduate had taken them. The first was of a son and father standing side-by-side, the son garbed in his cap and gown with his arm around the father. Both were smiling. The caption read “I wanted a natural picture of my graduate.” The thing was that there was a giant circle with a line going through it on top of the picture. The next picture’s caption read, “This seemed more natural.” This picture was of a father shrugging his shoulders with his pockets turned out, and a son in cap and gown holding up the father’s wallet and smiling a huge smile.

Being the optimist I am, the main message from this poster I took is that there are many things to celebrate. We celebrate with the graduates as they walk into a newness of life after graduation. But we also celebrate with the parents. Maybe these parents were celebrating the possibility that their graduate was about to go get a job and pay his own way. So there are many things to celebrate around the time of graduation.

It may seem strange to make a transition from our memorial service to a theme of celebration. But I feel that celebration is an important part of honoring those that have come before us. When we remember people and events of the past, we must remember to celebrate them as a way to give them honor. And the truth is that we here at Trinity Christian Church have many things to be thankful for and to celebrate.

For one, we are still in the midst of celebrating our graduates. I attended a graduation ceremony last week and will attend another next week and the week after. It is exciting to me to watch my friends walk across the stage and see them move their tassels from the right to the left on their caps. That is the moment that the change takes place. As the tassel moves from right to left, the graduate leaves behind the old way of life and moves into a new life. They now have a new relationship with their parents and a new relationship with the world. It is worth celebrating.

Another thing we celebrate today is the birth of the church. The church found new life at Pentecost. For those of you that don’t know the story very well, our scripture reading from Acts 2:1-21 is the story of the first recorded church service. A brief history is this: The gospels tell the story of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension to be with God. But before Jesus left, he promised the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them until he returned. We move into Acts. The first chapter tells of the apostles replacing Judas (the disciples became apostles after Jesus left to be with God). The second chapter is the first church service where the apostles gather in a house and a sound like a rushing wind enters. Tongues of fire appear on each of the apostles. This is the Holy Spirit. Then the apostles begin speaking in foreign tongues. All this sound draws a crowd, and the people that come hear the apostles speaking them in the people’s native languages. They are speaking the good news of the gospel to the people. And this is the first church service. It is what we celebrate on Pentecost Sunday.

We have also chosen today to celebrate the lives of the people that came before us. If we are honest, we admit that those that came before us helped to make us into who we are. We believe that we are the sum of our parts. But our parts reach beyond this body and this present moment. They reach back into the past, into past events and past people. All of this makes us into our present selves, and today we give honor to those in our past. They were the seed sewers. They were the planters. The seeds they planted have been and are continuing to spring up and create new life in and around us at all times. We cherish that and celebrate that today. In fact, this new life is at the heart of our scripture reading from John 12:20-33. So let's begin by looking at the scripture.

We start with the Greeks. The Greeks are coming to see Jesus. At first glance there is nothing remarkable about that. In fact, I first read this part of the scripture and thought of star-struck fans. Maybe they were coming to get an autograph or to have their pictures made with Jesus. Or maybe they were like the ancient form of paparazzi. Maybe they had heard about Jesus eating with prostitutes and tax collectors and just wanted to get a picture of it. Well, of course, that is absolutely incorrect. When we read a little deeper into the scripture we find that these Greeks were very respectful about the way they approached Jesus. They didn't rush in and try to mob him. They instead approached Phillip and said, "Sir, we'd like to talk to Jesus." They asked respectfully and reverently. Maybe they felt Jesus had something to teach that they could learn. But it was Jesus' response to their coming that is so fantastic here. Phillip went to Andrew and they both came to Jesus, who said in response, "My hour has come."

What could the approaching Greeks represent so that Jesus would respond with a statement like this? To understand, we must also understand the political implications of the Greeks' approach. You see, Jesus had been traveling with the disciples to Jewish towns, villages, and cities spreading this message about a new way to live in God. He wasn't throwing out the old way to live, but was adding to it to show them a new life that was possible. And as they traveled, Jesus gained followers and fame. He also gained power, and this made the religious leaders and political leaders very nervous. They opposed Jesus and did not want him to have power. The problem with the Greeks seeking out Jesus was found in the fact that Jesus' teachings had made it outside the Jewish communities and into the communities of the gentiles. (Gentiles are anyone who is not Jewish, so the Greeks here are considered gentiles.) This means Jesus' fame, influence and power were growing all the more. And the leaders of the Jewish community could not allow that. They had to stop him. Jesus knew and understood this. So he realized that his time had come.

So what does this mean for Jesus? When we hear those words, "My hour has come," we often think about his impending death. This was absolutely a part of what Jesus meant. He was going to die soon, and he knew it. So it is right to understand his statement in this way.

Death is something we all deal with. It touches each one of our lives. We all lose people that are close to us, and it hurts. There isn't anything any one of us wouldn't do to have one more moment with our loved ones that have passed away. But the hard truth of the matter is that we cannot. We carry their memories with us; they live in our hearts. But, we will not have the same relationship with our loved ones that have passed away that we once had. So there must be something else to hold on to. There must be something else to grasp. The same is true in our scripture. Jesus is talking about his

impending death when he says, “My hour has come,” but there is something else there to hold on to. In order to understand it, we must look at some other sections of John.

A few weeks ago we read from the 13th chapter of John, verses 31-35. In this scripture, Jesus begins to explain his relationship with God. As we read forward from this scripture we find other areas where Jesus continues this discussion. Basically he states that he will receive glory and through that, God will receive glory. Jesus tells the disciples that he is in God and that God is in him. In essence, he is telling them that this message he has been teaching, preaching, and living for the benefit of the world is the same message God wants to give to the world. They are of the same mind. In this, they are one. So when Jesus says, “My hour has come,” he is not only talking about his hour of death, but also his hour of glorification – God’s hour of glorification. We have to hold these two ideas in tandem if we are to truly get at the heart of this scripture in John 12:20-33.

What is the glory associated with Jesus’ hour? Jesus follows this statement with a parable about a seed. He often uses parables about seeds, farming, plants, and land. The people of his time were largely agricultural. It was something they understood. If Jesus came today, he would probably not talk to us about seeds. He might talk about the Internet, traffic, or the water cooler at work where everyone gossips. But in this story and with this audience, he discusses seeds. He makes the point that when a seed is dropped and buried a transformation happens. The seed ceases to be what it was. In essence, it dies. It becomes something else that produces abundant new life. In this image, Jesus points to the glory given to God in this hour. The new life that grows abundantly from the buried seed is a glory to God.

The message Jesus has been spreading throughout the world about new life in God is a glorification to God. It is an honor to God. And when the seeds Jesus has planted take root and spring up in new life, it is a glorification of God. Jesus’ very life becomes a seed that brings new life. And what does that say for those of us who choose to follow Christ? It places us right into that equation of relationship with Jesus and God. If Jesus is in God and God is in him, that when we are in Christ, we are also in God. John 12:26 tells us that God will honor the followers of Jesus. God shares that honor with us. That is what it means to be in the family of God and to be in God. That is what it means to be in Christ. We become sowers of seed. We become planters. We give honor to God and to all that preceded us by following Christ. And that is something to be celebrated!

When we celebrate those that came before us, we celebrate Christ in them. We celebrate God in them. We give honor to them for the seeds they planted and the seeds they are in Christ. May we always hold them dear in our hearts and memories, and may we continue the work they began as sowers of seed. For it is work that has helped to mold us into who we are and who we will become.