

**John 12:20-33 (NRSV)**

- 20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.  
21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”  
22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.  
24 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.  
25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.  
26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.  
27 “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.  
28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”  
29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”  
30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.  
32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

**TO BE GLORIFIED**

What is grace? We often think of grace in terms of gifts: Someone gave us a gift, and someone else paid for it, so it's mine without cost. Another way to think of grace is as an action that increases the value of our existence. It is a grace that you receive more than you deserve. That's the basic point of grace.

When pastors share the benediction, they invite the three persons of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Of the three persons of the Trinity, Jesus' ministry is connected by grace. This is not my argument, but what the Apostle Paul says in the Bible. Sometimes, I changed and prayed for the grace of God and the love of Jesus Christ.

However, in the benediction that pastors share, the work of Jesus is linked by grace.

I hope you'll familiarize yourself with the benediction as well. Peace be with you is a nice greeting, but the Grace of Jesus Christ being with you is a very nice greeting too. (It signifies that when you leave this place on Sunday I pray that the grace of God will be with you throughout the week and will sustain and nourish you in all that you do.)

In the process of becoming a UMC pastor, there are countless interviews involved. One of the questions that always comes up is a description of grace, and I was asked about that early on in my interview.

I described grace through the analogy of "a child who his parents love." That was a perfect answer because the labor and dedication that parents put into meeting their children (whether they were born or adopted) and loving and serving them were similar to grace.

But then the questioner asked again: Children whose parents abused them in the home would not experience grace, so would that analogy be an appropriate description for someone who was abused?

I didn't have an answer to that question, and I've been thinking about it ever since. Is it possible to experience "pure grace" in the secular society we live in? If you live in a good family or a good country, you can experience something like that, but not everyone can. I began to think more deeply about the ministry of Jesus Christ, which manifested God's grace.

The Gospels are books that record the answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" We know that during Jesus' ministry everyone who encountered him experienced the kingdom of God. It wasn't just for the religious leaders. People who were disqualified from being children of God experienced being Abraham's offspring and children of God through Jesus. Women and children, orphans, the brokenhearted, and the sick came to know God through Jesus.

The focus of Jesus' ministry was to share and teach God's grace generously, unfiltered, and to the best of his ability, and we get a glimpse of the results in the Gospels.

In today's scripture, we hear an interesting story that we don't hear in the other gospels. It's a brief summary of an incident in which Gentiles came to meet Jesus. Greeks came to celebrate a Jewish holiday. Presumably, the Greeks were people who had a heart to serve God, but they had also heard about Jesus. So, they came to meet him.

The Bible says that Jesus had 12 disciples, but Luke says that he had 70. Given Jesus' personality and ministry, it's likely that the number of his followers was a bit larger and more diverse, especially since today's story of the Greeks coming to meet Jesus adds to that possibility. It is likely that the Greeks also became (and have since become) followers of Jesus. This is because it's only after Jesus is told that the Gentiles have come to meet him that he begins to mention his final journey.

But in today's story, Jesus makes an important statement. "The time has come for the Son of God to be glorified." Jesus' ministry has been a ministry of grace and truth, and he's heading toward the end of that ministry, and he knows where it is going to end: on the cross.

Jesus explained to his disciples many times that he would suffer and die, but his disciples didn't understand it. Do you understand it? I don't think I would have understood it either had I been there.

Today, we don't have enough time to share fully an explanation of the theology of the cross so I will explain it briefly.

The cross was an instrument of murder in its day. The cross was also a symbol of shame. (In Jesus' youth, probably around AD 6, there was a crucifixion of two thousand Jews in a place called

Sepphoris.) I think this is why the disciples didn't understand that Jesus was going to die on the cross. It was incomprehensible to them that their teacher would die on a cross, a shameful, horrifying punishment, usually involving only the worst criminals.

The cross was a(the) place where there was no mercy and no grace. Those who lost their family members on the cross must have lived a lifetime of pain and suffering, and here was Jesus, walking down that path, proclaiming that it was time for him to be glorified. Does this make sense to you?

As we meditate on grace and truth, we realize that Jesus fully revealed God's grace on the cross. God's love for us was made perfect through Jesus' journey unto death. In the culture of the time, gods were described as beings that tortured and killed humans (Greek mythology). But the God of the Jews and our God were different; God loved humans and allowed God's only son to die on the cross for them. I don't know if there is a story in the worldview of that time where a god was described as killed by humans, but Jesus said that was the way of glory.

The cross, at that time, symbolized human shame and hopelessness. It implies the end. Jesus went on the cross to reveal God's love, to reveal life and truth in the place of death. No matter how shameful someone's life may be, it cannot escape the love and grace that is in God. That is why Jesus is to be glorified.

During this Lenten season, I have a chance to pray in the sanctuary. I turned on the lights when I was in the sanctuary for the dawn prayer. Whenever I see the cross, I think about that. If you took a first-century Roman soldier in a time machine and brought him here, he would be puzzled. Here's a cross, an instrument of murder..... He would be very surprised. On a cross that speaks of eternal shame and death, Jesus is glorified. Yet, through that horrifying action of Jesus' crucifixion. He reveals God's love to us.

Are you lonely? Do you think no one knows the pain of your shame and suffering? Are there people around you who are suffering from shameful things? The Lord came for you and for them, and we need to invite them into the love of God and the grace of Jesus.

Lent is coming to an end. This week, if you know someone who needs God's love and help, why not have tea or a meal with them? Listen to their story, and then say something to them to let them feel the fullness of God's love for them. May the Grace of Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Let us pray.

As we think of those around us who are in shame, despair, frustration, and sorrow, let this be a Lent in which we do not forget that Jesus came for them. Let us follow the way of Jesus, who was glorified in humility. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.