

## **“The Hour Has Come” – John 12:20-33 – March 21, 2021**

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Today’s lesson from John’s gospel brings us to a significant moment in the life and ministry of Jesus – a turning point. Up until now, while Jesus had both provoked the religious leaders and gained favor from the people, he had been able to avoid any dire consequences from these confrontations. In those instances, the text repeatedly noted that for Jesus, his hour had not yet come. Then suddenly, from a seemingly random interaction – some Greeks approached the disciples, wanting to see Jesus – Jesus said, “the hour has come.”

This phrase was a euphemism for his death. He knew his death was imminent, and so now he will begin to talk about it more and more. While John’s gospel does not describe a heart-wrenching scene in the Garden of Gethsemane like the synoptic gospels, in this scene Jesus said that he was troubled in his soul, and he wondered if he should call upon God the Father to save him from this hour, his death. Now that the hour has come, should Jesus attempt to avoid it?

But Jesus also knew that through his death would also come his glorification. In that moment he heard God’s affirmation of that, and he knew that in his glorification, the evil powers of this world would be exposed and defeated. His death would open the way to life. A different life, a better life – a life of wholeness to which no earthly power could ever compare.

Jesus told his disciples a simple parable, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus was making the choice to follow the path of death knowing what would come out of it. He chose to stand up to the earthly powers – the systems of violence, oppression, and injustice – by giving himself. Out of love for us, he gave himself over to the very systems that have kept so much of humankind in bondage. Love confronted evil, not by a show of worldly power or force or domination, but by exposing its weaknesses and modeling a better, more fruitful way to live.

In the example of the grain of wheat, when a seed falls to the earth it undergoes a process of change. It is the simple transformation of a single grain into a fruit-bearing plant. Jesus described it as a death to its current form, its current nature, and then showed it being reborn into something capable of so much more. But here’s the thing, it did not change into something completely new or different, instead the grain transformed into something that it had the capacity to become. It contained within itself the potential to become something more. All it needed was to have the outside stimulation to awaken the process of transformation – in the case of the seed, it needed soil, water, light – all those things that encourage growth.

Jesus then applies this teaching to those of us who would follow him. To be his disciple requires us to experience a death to self – a death to all those things that tie us to the life-

destroying powers of this world. And there are so many forces in this world that seduce us with claims of fulfillment, satisfaction, pleasure, and power.

We seem to be drawn to those things that hinder our spiritual growth – those things that provide a false and feeble claim to success. Yet they can never fully quench the thirst we have for something more. That is because we have within us that potential for the wholeness of life for which God created us.

The things of this world are never enough, and they never will be enough. They are never enough because they are narrowly focused – self-serving, self-indulgent, self-centered. In the moment, worldly pursuits are satisfying, but that satisfaction never lasts. So we are constantly chasing after our next fix. A never-ending cycle of self-delusion and self-destruction.

You would think that once we realize that we have been created for something more – that eternal life that Christ offers to us – that we would drop everything else and accept the all-encompassing love of God. Were it only that easy! It's not easy, but it does get easier.

The closer we draw to Christ, the more we are able to recognize and name the evil powers and systems at work in the world. But even more important, we begin to see how those powers are at work in us and in others. This comes from intentionally loving others, from listening to the stories and experiences of others, especially of those most impacted by the harmful systems of this world, and from making changes in our own lives.

Like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies to its old way of being in order to blossom into its full potential, Christ too calls us to die to our selfish natures and bids us to follow him into a new life – a life defined by love given for others. May we blossom into the humans that God has called us to be, bearing abundant fruit so that all people may experience the fullness of a life lived in God's love.