

John 12:12-26

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[0 : 00] The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

[1 : 05] So the Pharisees said to one another, You see that they are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me.

And where I am, there will be my servant. There will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 08] Thanks be to God. Good morning, everybody. And it's great to see so many of you, week by week, in celebration of the Lord's work in our midst.

It's not lost on me today that this sermon, which you're about to hear, is the final word, corporate word, that the Lord has for us before the first word we will receive as Christ Church Chicago.

In other words, this Sunday begins the final week of 22 years as Holy Trinity Church for those of us in Hyde Park.

And it concludes over two decades of ministry. And come next Sunday, we will launch into the first word that he will have for us as Christ Church Chicago.

So, as we finish in one way, what is it from this text that the writer would have us come to understand about Jesus?

[3 : 25] And what is it from here that we would hear from Jesus? We certainly live in a day where all of us feel a greater need of understanding and a greater desire to hear a word from the Lord.

Interestingly, you're looking at a text today that's neatly divided into two halves. And my first question on what do we need to understand about him, you can see emerges from what we find in Jesus.

In verse 16, there was something that the disciples came later to understand. And the second question falls out of verses 23 and 24, which emphasizes something the disciples needed to hear.

So, think of it this way. Verses 12 through 19, what do we need to understand about Jesus? You can say, verse 16, they did not understand these things at first.

And then, verses 20 to 26, what is the word you need to hear today from Jesus? For you'll notice in verse 23, he is answering them.

[5 : 12] And in verse 24, truly, truly, he has something important to say to them. For those who appreciate well-written literature, one final word before really getting underway.

I love the way this text mirrors itself in regard to similar narrative settings. The understanding in verse 16, take a look, comes in a narrative context of the Passover feast.

And on a day when large crowds came to meet him. And in a mirroring way, the idea of what we need to hear from him also comes in the narrative setting of a Passover feast.

But this time, when some Greeks arrived who wanted to speak with him. Do you see the way the narrator beautifully anchors the text for you?

Verse 12, the next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast, notice what they do. They took branches and went out to meet him. Large crowd at the feast, out to meet him.

[6 : 38] And then verse 20. Now, among those at the feast are Greeks who say, sir, we wish to see him. So with all of that beauty and coherence at a literary level put before us, let's take a look.

What would John have us understand about Jesus? Verses 12 to 19. Initially, we can say this.

He wants us to know that the disciples had no clue on the day of the triumphal entry. That all that the crowds were doing and that all that the crowds were saying was actually fulfilling Bible passages that had long ago been put down about the Lord's Christ.

In other words, they had no idea that his entrance into Jerusalem and all of their speaking and all of their doing were indicating that this Jesus is that Christ long ago promised in God's prophetic word.

In other words, prophetic words that had long ago been hidden from view, like texts that had their voices suspended or passages that were lying dormant and seemingly unfulfilled.

[8 : 18] That these Old Testament quotations were in a sense arriving now in Jesus as the giver of life who would rescue God's people.

Let me show it to you. There can be no doubt that verse 13, where they are crying out, Hosanna.

Now, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel, as well as verse 15, fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming seated on a donkey's colt.

Our Old Testament texts that the disciples did not understand. Verse 16, that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Just recently, we watched some of the Harry Potter videos, those of us who were sequestering at our own home here in Hyde Park.

And one of the senses that you pick up is that there were things set down long before the events that you're watching that were, in a sense, there in waiting for just the time of climactic fulfillment.

[9 : 48] And that's what John is saying we need to understand about Jesus. What do you need to know about him today?

Namely, that when he entered into the Jerusalem, there was a fulfillment of prophetic scriptures that now we have the one who is the giver of life.

Just take a look down with your eyes. Verse 18, we know the reason why the crowd went out to meet him. It was because they had heard that he had done this sign unto Lazarus of giving life.

And so the life-giving, promised Christ is arriving in the city as Jesus enters on that day.

And no one had any idea. Not the crowds who were almost subconsciously, unconsciously fulfilling biblical texts.

[10 : 56] Not those closest to Jesus. Indeed, the disciples claimed that they had no comprehension that this was going on. Or even in verse 20, not those who would be his chief combatants.

No one had any idea that when Jesus entered into the city at the Passover feast, it was in fulfillment of prophetic scriptures to indicate that this Jesus, this one, is that promised Christ.

Two texts specifically finally found their fulfilling voice. Look at verse 13 again. Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel.

And verse 15, fear not, your king is coming seated on a colt. I looked up the references to these quotations.

And the first one is embedded in Psalm 118. And the second one is located in Zechariah chapter 9.

[12 : 07] The Psalm 118 text is particularly interesting. It was one of the praise psalms.

Evidently, when the Jews would come to Passover, and even to this day it's still carried out, they would sing in that week, Psalm 113, 14, 115, 16, 17, and Psalm 118.

It was the climactic psalm or hymn of the Passover. And that psalm speaks of one, the righteous one, who was coming in through the gates.

I was struck by it in verse 19 of Psalm 118. Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord. The righteous shall enter through it. And so as Jesus is on the colt, entering through the gate, the gates in a sense have opened to the king that David had prophesied would bring life to God's people.

[13:25] What was missed then and would easily be missed today is that Psalm 118 also has this opaque nature to it that the one who brings life is ensconced in death.

Let me just show that to you from Psalm 118. Look at verse 13. This prophetic, anointed Christ says that he was pushed hard so that he was falling.

And indeed, that is what transpires in the life of Christ over the week of this Passover. Or even more directly, verse 22, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, which later is a complete indication of Jesus and his death being the miraculous way in which God would bring life. Or take a look at verse 27 of Psalm 118. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords up to the horns of the altar.

Amazing. David, in prophetic voice, speaking of entering into the city of God, in which he will bring life and righteousness.

[15:01] But in the psalm itself, hidden in opaque form, all the language and irony of a coming death.

The other text there is in verse 15 from Zechariah chapter 9, which also speaks of God arriving at the gate of Jerusalem and entering in to bring life, an abundant life, to God's people.

So what do we need to know as we sit here today in this first scene? We need to know or come to understand what the disciples later recognized.

That when Jesus entered into the city under the palm branches of a waving crowd and under a lifting of their voices from Psalm 118 and Zechariah 9, that this Jesus fulfills all the life-giving promises that were embedded in that Christ.

In other words, that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. Let me give it to you this way when you're wondering, what do I need to know about him today in my life?

[16:32] You need to know this, that Jesus is the one who can offer to you life. And you can count on it because he is in his journey, the climactic fulfillment of a prophetic word long ago put down in biblical text.

That's what you need to know. That's what you need to understand about Jesus. As you consider what Pastor Nee mentioned at the call to worship about, should we allow Christ to enter into our lives like coming under the lenthil and over the threshold of the gates of a city?

And do I allow him in?

And do I allow him in? And do I allow him in? But what do we need to hear? What would he say to us today about this life that he offers us?

Let me say a couple of things from verses 20 and following. First, the life that Jesus offers us requires the death that Jesus died for us.

[18:24] The life that he offers, 12 to 19, requires the death that he died and spoke of here in 20 to 26.

Look at verse 23. Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. The life that he offers requires the death that he died.

Notice that word glory, the hour of glory. I mean, the two halves of these texts are beautiful. It's as if all the crowds are saying, His time has come.

And Jesus, acknowledging that, would like us to know, Yes, but the hour of my death has arrived.

[19:29] And look at verses 24 again, this analogy of a dying seed. It's agricultural. In other words, that unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it has no real capacity to bring life.

And this hints at what is going to happen for Jesus on the cross. That his substitutionary death was a necessity if it was to bear fruit and offer life to us.

In other words, he argues by way of analogy or the realm of nature, something that Paul will later indicate is true, not just in the natural world, but in the supernatural world.

That mortality must give way and die if immortality is to be gained. And this is the irony of our Lord. Life offered requires his death willingly given. But there's more than that.

[20 : 46] And this is where I've been wrestling in my own life over the last few days. It isn't just that the life Jesus offers us required the death Jesus died for us.

There's another word he wants us to hear. Look at verses 25 and 26. He wants us to hear that there is a dying to self that he will demand of us, but not without a promise that eternal life and honor will be given to the Father, given by the Father to us.

Let me read it. It's worth looking at with clarity this morning. Verse 25. Whoever loves his life loses it.

And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Now, he's not some self-hater. You need to just think of the way in which language is working here. There's a prioritization that to the one who is only trying to secure their own welfare in the here and now, you actually don't have the ability to gain that.

But if you relinquish yourself to holding on to everything in the here and now, you'll actually have the ability to gain, it says, eternal life. And then verse 26, the very beginning.

[22 : 07] If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Let me just stop on that for a moment.

There is here a dying to self that is demanded of us. It isn't merely the necessity of his death for us. It is a willingness to embrace that as our own pattern as well. That we will walk out a life of self-denial.

Of restrictions in a way. That there are things we will not do and places we will not go and beliefs we will not hold.

That there are crosses for us to bear on our own road to glory. For indeed, as the text points to him, he also becomes a pattern of life for all of us who would follow him.

[23 : 21] What does Jesus want us to hear this morning? He wants us to hear a radical call for discipleship. He wants us to place our eyes and gaze on eternal life, not merely this temporal life.

He wants us to follow him. He wants us to pick up our cross. He wants us to relinquish the pursuits that would elevate ourselves.

And yet we would walk humbly in submission under him. This is the word that Jesus would have us hear.

Yes, there is life offered to us. But there was a death that was required by him for us.

And if we get it, we actually willingly die to self for he demands it of us. But I love the way the text ends.

[24 : 35] It doesn't end just on this Christian idea of self-denial and duty. The text actually explodes that this denial of self that's demanded of us does not come without a promise.

And the promise is that eternal life and honor will be given by the Father to us.

Take a look at verse 26. The end of verse 25.

The end of verse 26. The Father himself will honor us. This is reward.

The reward of grabbing hold of the life that Christ has for you through a death through which your sins were paid for.

[25 : 54] The reward of a radical call for discipleship where we follow in his footsteps, where we each take up our own cross and follow him.

The reward of a radical call for discipleship where we follow in his footsteps, that these ancient Hebrew texts find their fulfillment in our Lord.

And we need to know, therefore, that he is the promised one who offers us life. What do we need to hear?

Well, but that life, scene one, is ironically embedded in death, scene two.

Death was necessary for him. Death to self is required from us unto him. And only through that will eternal life and honor be given to us by the Father.

[27 : 29] I don't know what you feel as you enter into another week. Certainly there are many things in our lives that we don't understand.

Certainly there are incredible situations in which you and I are longing to hear a particular word from Jesus.

And this is what the scriptures would have for us today. There is something that we now understand about him. He is the giver of life.

There is something that we need to hear from him. It required his death. It demands our own dying. But it will one day bring great fruit into eternal life.

Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we now turn to sing, Jesus, I my cross have taken. I pray that the words sung out loud by each of us in our own private places would be gathered collectively before your throne.

[28 : 48] And that they would embody the heart of this congregation. That as we complete our lives within Holy Trinity, we would reset our lives under your calling.

We give ourselves to you again then today with great joy and vigor and faith. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.