John 12:20-36 PM

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Preacher: Ryan Spear

[0:00] Let us pray. Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Please have a seat. As Chelsea mentioned, my name is Ryan Spear. It's a privilege to serve here at St. John's as a curate. It's kind of like a pastoral apprentice.
And I get to hang out with the youth this year. It's been great. It's a pleasure to lead this youth takeover with you tonight. So as you heard in our readings from John chapter 12, and if you want to follow along, you can find it on page 898 in your pew Bibles.
And our passage in John's starts off a new sermon series here at St. John's over the next five weeks in the season of Lent. It's called The Cross of Christ.
Now, if you don't know much about Lent, Lent is a little bit like cleaning your room with Jesus. So imagine you're digging out all the stuff you've crammed under your bed, and way back in your closet, you're dividing it into stuff to throw away, stuff to give away, stuff to keep.
[1:15] And that's kind of like what we invite Jesus to do with us in the season of Lent. But in this case, it's not our messy rooms, it's our messy hearts. We invite him to come with us and set things in order as we approach Easter and the cross.

So we're going to be remembering and preparing for Easter in this season by contemplating the cross of Christ. Now, the cross, it's the center of Easter, and it's the center of the gospel, which is the good news of what Jesus has done for all of us.
Now, here's the big idea of our passage. The cross displays the glory of God. And it displays the glory of God by showing what judgment is, and by freeing us from darkness and into light.
Now, we're going to work through our passage today by asking the same two questions the crowd asked Jesus in our passage today. You'll find these two questions in verse 34.
They say to Jesus, Now, we've heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is the Son of Man?
[2:25] Another way to put these two questions is, What is the meaning of the cross? And who is Jesus? Now, in the world today, most people have a vague sense of who Jesus is.

They also have a vague sense of what the cross is. Maybe they think it's a piece of jewelry, or some kind of cool design to put on things. Maybe they think of Jesus as some great moral example to follow, or a tragedy, a pretty nice guy who tried to do some good things that was put to death.
But what we see in the cross is the central purpose of why Jesus came and who Jesus is. So these are our two questions. What does the cross mean?
And who is Jesus? We're going to dive right into part one. What is the meaning of the cross? This takes us to verse 20. And it tells us it means three things. First of all, to be lifted up means death. Secondly, to be lifted up means judgment. And third, to be lifted up means glory. Death, judgment, and glory.
[3:33] First, let's look at death. Now, to set the stage a little bit. In verse 20, we're told some Greeks want a word with Jesus. What's going on here? Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

Word has spread about what he's been doing. He just raised Lazarus from the dead. And people are hearing about this all over. It is highly unique that now is the time when Greeks, non-Jewish people, come to say, we want to see who this Jesus is.
It's a representation of the whole world beginning to come to seek Jesus. But notice in verse 23, as soon as Andrew and his brother Philip, I think they work up the courage.
You'll notice there's this interesting pattern. They come to Philip first. Philip then goes to Andrew. He's like, hey, this is kind of weird, but some Greeks want to talk to Jesus. I need you here for some

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backup or moral support. But they come to Jesus, and he says something that's kind of surprising. He says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now, it sounds kind of exciting at first.
[4:42] Throughout the book of John, there's been a pattern. Jesus has kept saying, the hour's not yet. The hour's not yet. People keep wanting Jesus to say, is your kingdom going to come?

Are you going to overthrow these Romans? Are you going to finally put us back where we belong? But now, when some Greeks come to him, he says, the hour has come to be glorified. And maybe at first, I'd like to think Andrew and Philip might have been a little excited.
Great. Finally, let's get this thing going. But what does Jesus say right afterwards? Right after he says, it's time to be glorified.
In verse 23, in verse 24, he says, Do you know that it's truly, truly, it's a way of emphasizing what he's about to say. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.
Why follow this pronouncement of the hour has come for glory to start talking about death? What's going on here? Now, I think the kids talk nailed it.
[5:47] They talked about this passage here. And I won't do the thing that always annoyed me when I was sitting where you are, where a pastor's like, oh, the kids talk nailed it. And we don't even need to preach. But then they keep on preaching, you know.

Well, I just did it myself just now. But this is our first clue about the meaning of the cross. It means death. And it's a death to self.
And it's a self-giving life of service towards others. We see how this death is described. It's described as a seed that's dying, yet bearing much fruit.
It's described as a life that is lost, but is kept for eternity. Notice here that there's a transformation happening through the cross.
From death to life. From losing life to keeping it for eternity. And in verse 26, there's an invitation. Now notice in these verses, there's a small detail here.
[6:44] He says it several times. Whoever, whoever, anyone, anyone. Here's the point. The cross of Christ transforms death into a doorway.

It's a doorway to a transformed life. It's a doorway for everyone, Jews and Greeks. It's a doorway that leads to being honored by the Father.
Now the problem is, we try to seek honor in this life. Reputation, significance, value. But Jesus says that the true honor comes from the Father.
But this death that happens isn't just some future state. It starts now. This is probably one of the most difficult parts and the most countercultural parts of this passage.
Because we live in a culture of self-love. It's often the very first thing you're told to do. Love yourself. The example that's often given is the airplane example, right?
[7:46] The face masks fall down. Put one on yourself first, right? That kind of makes sense intuitively. But this is shocking. It says the pathway to full life is not love of self, but love of God to the extent that you're willing to give up your life, bearing much fruit, death to self, death to yourself as king in your life.

Because we all kind of live like we're the main characters in our own stories, don't we? This is the first profound claim in the meaning of the cross.
Death becomes a doorway to abundant life. So secondly, the meaning of the cross, what it means to be lifted up, part two, is judgment.
We see this starting in verse 31. Now the word for judgment in verse 31 means like verdict. It's a verdict. It's like a decision in a court case, a yes or no, an innocent or guilty.
But it's also related to the word crisis. Now one of the definitions of a crisis is a serious situation where a difficult or important decision must be made.
[9:02] A serious situation where you have to make a decision. Here's the point. The cross is a judgment because the cross is a crisis.

It's a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. This helps to explain in part Jesus' state of mind in verse 27 when he says, Now is my soul troubled.
Jesus is in crisis. The pain before him is the excruciating pain of crucifixion. Actually, that's where we get the word excruciating from the cross.
It's the pain of betrayal and abandonment by his closest friends. But more so, it's the horror of what awaits him on the cross as he takes into himself the sin of the world.

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He's taking the full force of the judgment of God on himself. And yet, this judgment isn't quite what it seems.
[10:13] Verse 31 says, Now is the judgment of this world, and the ruler of this world will be cast out. One author put it this way, The world thought it was passing judgment on Jesus.

In reality, the cross was passing judgment on them. What Satan thought was his victory turned out to be his defeat.
Now, C.S. Lewis captured this in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Do you remember this scene? When Aslan is on the stone table giving his life for the traitor, Edmund.
He tells the White Witch, who does not know this, that there is a deeper magic. The thing they thought would defeat Aslan is in fact the thing that makes him victorious.
The cross means judgment. It means the ways of this world are held to the standards of the cross. And it means all of us face a decision, a crisis, in light of the cross.
[11:24] It's something you must deal with. You must give an account for. You must answer. So first, the cross meant death, but death becomes a doorway.

Secondly, the cross means judgment becoming a crisis, a decision for us to make. Which leads us to our final detail about the meaning of the cross, the glory of God.
God. Now we first saw the word glory in verse 23, and then we see it in verse 28 several times. Jesus says, beginning in the verse just before, that this is the purpose for which he has come.
Not a tragic accident, not an unfortunate circumstance to an otherwise successful life, not too bad that he didn't stick around longer, he could have accomplished so much more, but this is the purpose for why he's here.
Now, to get a grasp of what glory means, it's really helpful to think of glory in kind of three unique but related ways. So first of all, glory means weightiness, like heaviness.
[12:31] So, I don't know if you've been like me, but did you ever pick up your Christmas presents before opening them to feel how heavy they were? Yeah? Okay, I feel some nodding heads, that's good, I wasn't just the only person doing this.

I don't know, I always thought if it was heavier, it must mean it's worth more, right? If it's really light, you're like, oh, it's probably like a scarf, which is fine.
But if it's heavy, this is good, this is a good sign. Secondly, glory in Scripture means like a sense of like radiance, like shininess.
Like think of a sunset you might have seen where you thought, this is glorious. glorious. And finally, glory has this sense of reputation. But glory of a thing is how well known it is.
Now, I had this experience once around reputation as I found a really cheap jacket at a thrift store that was a really good brand. So, I went around telling people, look at this great deal I got.
[13:31] But they didn't know the brand was like worth anything. So, I first had to spend all this time trying to explain, no, this is actually a big deal, you should be pretty impressed with me right now. But they weren't.

But if they had known, they would have seen the reputation, they would have thought, oh, that's a big deal. So, this is the sense of glory that we're talking about. It's weightiness, it's shininess, it's reputation.
This is what the cross is. It becomes the heavy, reflective reputation of God. This is odd.
I believe Christianity is the only religion in the world that has an instrument of torture and execution at its central image. Now, how does this reflect the glory of God?
Why is this the case? Well, to grasp this, we go all the way back to the book of Exodus. You might remember, Moses, as he's leading the people out of Egypt, tells God on the mountain, I want to see your glory.
[14:38] Show me your glory. And God, in his goodness, says, I will, Moses, but I'm going to have to put you in a cleft of a rock because were you to see my full glory, I'm paraphrasing here, it would destroy you.

So, Moses, safely tucked into a rock, God says, I will allow my glory to pass before you and I will declare it to you. And this is what God says in this moment.
The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
This is the glory of God. The prophet Micah picks this up much later. Micah says, who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance?

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He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He delights in compassionate mercy.
[15:43] This is the scandal of the cross. It's the foolishness that Paul talks about in his letters. But God wouldn't be truly good if he wasn't truly just.

We hold this with the truth that God is glorified in his mercy and in his judgment because in his declaration of his name to Moses he continued keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving transgression and iniquity, but who will by no means clear the guilty?
What does this mean? Imagine you have a really great teacher in school that you love. Really nice person, really kind, always forgives you for handing in assignments late.
It's pretty great, huh? But imagine there's a classmate of yours who is a bully who torments his or her classmates, who makes those experiences miserable, and the teacher does nothing about it.
Is that teacher kind? Is that teacher merciful? No. To be truly kind and truly merciful, our God must also be just.
[16:58] And in God's glory and God's judgment, this means that we face a decision. You might have heard it been said that grace means getting what we don't deserve, and mercy means not getting what we do deserve.

The cross glorifies God because it displays his abundant and reckless grace and mercy in the face of his righteous judgment.
That's the answer to the first question posed in verse 34. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? What does the cross mean? It means the three things we've covered.
It means through the cross, death becomes a doorway to life. Through the cross, Jesus brings judgment which forces us into a crisis of decision.
And through the cross, God's glory is revealed in God's mercy. There is no other God like this. And as we close, we face the second question.
[18:02] Who is the Son of Man? This isn't just a question of identity. It's more a question of what type of Savior are you exactly, Jesus?

And in verse 35, we see in Jesus' response that the Son of Man is the light. And they are urged to respond, turn from the dark ways of sin that lead to death and walk in the light.
A few verses later, we're told that Jesus goes away. We didn't read this part in our reading. But after he says this publicly, he goes away to hide himself. Because in the book of John, this is the conclusion of his public ministry.
The next eight to ten days are his journey to the cross. But there's a really interesting detail. After a bit of explanation why Jesus comes to seek and save the lost, we see that Jesus cries out in verse 44 one more time.
and in his crying out, we see who he is. He says, I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.
[19:21] Who is the Son of Man? Who is Jesus? He's the light. He's the way, the truth, the life.
The cross is a crisis for everyone.

It places us in a serious situation where a decision must be made. It's urgent. The time to decide is now and it won't last forever.
This is why Jesus says the hour has come. Now is the judgment. The light is among you for just a little while longer. John wrote the entire Gospel of John for one purpose which he tells us later in the book that you may believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.
He wanted believers to keep believing and unbelievers to start believing. So if you're a follower of Jesus this evening, remember you have been freed from darkness.
Remember that you walk in the radiant light of the glory of the cross. And now through the power of the Holy Spirit working in you bear much fruit.
[20:35] The millions that we heard in the children's talk. Find your life in Christ. Follow Jesus. Serve Jesus. Be where Jesus is.

And the Father will honor you. Now if you aren't a follower of Jesus I want to ask you an important question. Will you let the light of Jesus into the darkness of your life?
When Jesus was lifted up on the cross in glory he said he was to draw all people to himself. That means you. He wants to draw you to himself.

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And I want to leave you these words which most are familiar with in John 3.16. I'm going to read verse 17 as well. people a little bit less familiar with verse 17.
For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
[21:40] For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

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