

John 12:20-33

Lent 5B; March 17 & 18, 2024

Years ago, when the Betty Crocker Company first began selling their cake mixes, they offered a product which only needed water. All you had to do was add water to the mix which came in the box, and you would get a perfect, delicious cake every time. It bombed. No one bought it and the company couldn't understand why, so they commissioned a study which brought back a surprising answer. It seemed that people weren't buying the cake mix because it was too easy.

They didn't want to be totally excluded from the work of preparing a cake; they wanted to feel that they were contributing something to it. So, Betty Crocker changed the formula and required the customer to add an egg in addition to water. Immediately, the new cake mix was a huge success. Unfortunately, many people make the same mistake when it comes to trusting in Jesus. It just seems too easy.

Last week, we looked at one of the most familiar verses in the Bible – John 3:16. Jesus wants us to know that the solution for sin is found only in him. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** Jesus' solution for sin seems so simple. It's a gift from God. In our minds, the thought of work sounds better. In almost every other aspect of life, we get better things by work. There has to be more that we need to do. We expect a more elaborate solution for sin.

Not only do we expect to do more, we also expect God to do more. The idea that life can only be found in death, doesn't sound all that glorious, does it? Jesus says: **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”**

When the farmer plants a seed, it is a dead seed. It doesn't look like a living plant. Yet, he sows those seeds with faith. He knows that if you put those dead seeds into the ground, water them, keep the weeds away, all those dead seeds will produce a whole field of wheat. Life can only come through death. The penalty for sin is death. That's why sin is such a heavy thing to bear. Sin does so much wrong. Sin offends God, it wrongs our neighbor, and even attacks us. Every sin is a sin against God. Every sin is against us. The harder we try to lift that weight off our shoulders, the deeper we seem to sink. It seems like there is no way out.

That's why we need Jesus. As Jesus is about to face the greatest battle this world has ever seen in a few days, it was not going to be easy. Jesus says: **“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”** It was going to be a hard thing to bear. Yet, Christ came to save sinners. He came to save us while we were still weak. He came to save us when we were ungodly. He came to save us when we were still God's enemies. So, the question is: *Are you a sinner? Good. Christ came for you. Are you ungodly? I've got good news for you. Jesus came for you.* Jesus came to do what we could not. Jesus came to give us glory through the cross.

If we think that glory comes to us through what we do, then it's kind of like playing with Mr. Potato Head. You can dress him up. You can change his body parts. You can make him smile. Yet, it doesn't change the fact that underneath it still is Mr. Potato Head. Underneath all the glory in this world, we are still ugly sinners. So, glory is found in death – the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Our glory is found in service to Jesus. **“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”** Jesus wants you to know that the love of God in Christ Jesus never changes. That love is for you.

This love of Jesus just sounds too simple. The people, around Jesus as he spoke the words of our text, didn't fully understand what Jesus was talking about. John tells us that **“Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.”** Even the Pharisees had to admit: **“Look how the whole world has gone after him!”** (John 12:17-19) They went out to see Jesus because he raised Lazarus from the dead. They did not

understand why He had come or where He would lead them. Their disappearance later in the week reveals their ignorance. The disciples were similarly unaware. John tells us they did not understand what Jesus was doing as He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey – **“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.”** (John 12:16) Only in the light of Easter did they understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

Jesus knew how hard it was going to be for his disciples and his believers to keep their eyes focused on him. Jesus says to his disciples: **“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** About 20 years ago, there was an athlete in the Olympics by the name of Matthew Emmons. Matthew was an American Rifle shooter. He was one of the best American rifle shooters. In the 2004 Olympics, his shot at the gold came down to the final competition. He was all set to win the gold. All he needed to do on his final shot was to hit the target – no bull’s eye, just anywhere on the target. He stepped into lane 2 and fired. Instead of hitting the target in lane 2, he hit the target in lane 3. He said that he accidentally hit the trigger too soon. Some said that he became confused and aimed at the wrong target. Regardless, as to what exactly happened, the result was the same. Instead of the gold, he took 8th place.

As we get closer to Jesus’ death on the cross, keep your eyes focused on Jesus. Even though we sin and miss God’s target every day, Jesus has done it for us. He gives us salvation as a gift. Then, we can give thanks that **“the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** Trust it. Amen.