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John 12:20-33

A Journey to Resurrection: Called to Die

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John 12:20-33 NRSV

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

Have you ever dreaded something? Maybe it is going to the doctor, or speaking in front of people, or going to the gym and exercising? Last fall I was dreading going to the doctor. You see the year before I had high blood pressure for the first time ever when I went to the doctor. And the doctor had asked me if anything had changed in my life and I shared with her that I had recently switched from working part-time to full-time. She asked if I had added stress and I just looked at her funny. She said to try and lose weight and exercise more and meditate to relieve stress. And I had good intentions, I was going to finally eat better and lose weight and get healthy, but I had not done any of those things. And I was dreading going back this past fall, a year later, for a check-up. Would I have to take blood pressure medication? I kept putting off calling to make an appointment and I finally decided I had to face the music and so I went, and my blood pressure was back to normal! So, I am back to my old habits. Please do not let me eat dessert at the potluck today.

I remember dreading childbirth. Lee and I were really looking forward to being parents, but I was not looking forward to the experience of childbirth. And, then, when our daughter was born, I looked at her beautiful face and instantly all of my dread and fear evaporated. My dread was transformed into hope and then into amazing joy. The kind of hope and joy that comes from really knowing and understanding that God loves me and God takes cares of me and God is with me even when I am afraid and filled with dread, even when I am sick or in pain or suffering.

Baby Bonnie was baptized this morning. Bonnie came a little bit earlier then her parents, Laura and David, expected. And after Laura went into early labor, it was a true miracle from God that the doctors were able to stop her labor and to help Bonnie grow a little bit more. And throughout that entire process there was a lot of fear, and a lot of dread, but then with each and every day the hope grew and there was such great joy when Bonnie was born and Laura was okay.

For Laura and David and for all of us at Greenland Hills, our dread was transformed into hope and joy. Dread and fear, of course, are human emotions. We always will experience dread and fear when we are faced with illness or other life struggles. But, in the middle of those experiences, we all need to remember that the God of love is with us, that love and hope and joy are more powerful than fear and dread.

In John’s Gospel there is no Garden of Gethsemane scene where Jesus prays and the disciples fall asleep over and over again. In Matthew, Mark and Luke at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says he is deeply grieved and he says, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” In John 18 when Jesus goes to the garden before he is arrested, there is no praying or grieving. Jesus goes up to the soldiers and asks who they are looking for. So, it is here in the scripture that we shared together that we sense Jesus’ dread about all that will happen.

Jesus says, “Now my soul is troubled.” Jesus is dreading what he knows will happen. We say that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Wanting to avoid suffering is human nature. We are seeing Jesus’ humanity. Jesus continues, “And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

Did you catch it? In John’s Gospel, the cross is not about sacrifice. In John’s Gospel, the cross is not about forgiveness of our sins. The cross is about the glory of God. The death of Jesus glorified God and drew people to Jesus. In the Message translation by Eugene Peterson, Jesus says, “Father, put your glory on display.” The cross is about the glory of God. The glory of God! Dread being transformed into hope and joy.

I heard a story on NPR’s Morning Edition this past Wednesday about Syria as it begins its fifth year of civil war. Syria is a place where there are 45 air strikes a day and there is a lot of dread. They interviewed a man who goes by the name of Saeed al Batal who lives a few miles outside of Damascus. The interviewer asked him how the families are surviving this winter and he shared that schools start at 6 a.m. and end at 8 a.m. because 8 a.m. is when the airstrikes arrive for the city. He said, “People here survive - and they are literally surviving using whatever they can to keep going.” He talked about how he and other people in Syria are creating fuel from plastic and using the earth to harvest their own food. He said, “People actually here are living on the edge. Every day is like your last day, so you have to seize it to the max.”[[1]](#footnote-1) What does he mean "seizing it to the max"? I think he means that he tries to find hope and joy and love in every day even when he is confronting a terrible situation.

Discarding dread and looking forward to hope and to joy. I wonder how much of the dread that we have is because we fear the unknown. When I was pregnant with my second child, I knew what to expect with childbirth. Jesus did not know what to expect, he had never died a human death. We do not know what to expect with death. I always feel like I am walking on holy ground when I am visiting people who are near death and they talk about how they are at peace, they are not afraid. Years ago, I discovered that those who die in peace are people of faith who know that the God of love and hope and joy has been at their side during all of their life and is at their side when they are dying. Usually, those people are surrounded by family and a loving group of friends, a community of faith.

I’ll Praise My Maker While I’ve Breath was one of the favorite hymns of John Wesley, the first Methodist. When he was very ill and death was near, he sang the entire hymn in a strong voice and amazed those who were gathered at his bedside. The next night, he tried and tried to sing the words, but all he could say was “I’ll praise, I’ll praise…” And with praise on his lips and in his heart, John Wesley made the journey to that life where immortality endures.[[2]](#footnote-2) “I'll praise my Maker while I've breath, and when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers; my days of praise shall ne'er be past, while life, and thought, and being last, or immortality endures.” Discarding death and looking forward to hope and to joy. Amen.

1. <http://www.npr.org/2015/03/18/393748185/a-syrian-photographers-life-in-civil-war> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/i/l/l/illprais.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)