



Church in a Bag

Sunday 21 March

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering



God of boundless mercy and unfailing love
our Creator, Saviour and Redeemer.
As part of the body of Christ around the world
as people called to live for You
in the families and communities and networks
in which You have placed us
we still ourselves to worship You
to proclaim Your goodness
and to offer our thanks and praise.
Meet us here, we pray.

Join our hearts in wholehearted worship
Your word into our souls.
Engrave Your covenant of grace into our minds and hearts.
Cultivate Your character in us
inspire and shape us, unite and encourage us
that our lives may reflect Your love and justice to the world.

Preparation

Within John's Gospel there is an ultimate countdown. It is not related to an annual occurrence like New Year's Day, but to a once-in-eternity, never-to-be-repeated event. John, writing some years afterwards, has already let us in on the mystery: 'the Word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth' (John 1:14:). However, it is worth remembering that, to those present at the time, the identity of this remarkable man came gradually – revealed sign by sign, claim by claim. John, more than other Gospel writers, explains how the miracles of Jesus were more than actions in history: they provided windows into the character of God and the identity of Jesus.

So, having just miraculously fed thousands, Jesus revealed Himself as the 'bread of life' (6:48); while healing a blind man, Jesus claimed to be 'the light of the world' (9:5); His encounter with the Samaritan women at Jacob's well (4:29) revealed God's omniscience and perfect knowledge, and Jesus'

intimate relationship with His Father. And throughout his Gospel, John regularly takes us back to that countdown: Jesus was aware of the eternal plan in which He stood centre stage. To His mother at the wedding in Cana Jesus said, 'My time has not yet come ...' (John 2:4); seven times we are told, '... a time is coming ...'; His persecutors could not touch Him because 'His time had not yet come ...' (John 7:30); as the time approaches for Jesus to die and rise and consummate the hope for all generations He prays, 'Father, the time has come ...' (John 17:1). Today's passage makes sense when understood in the context of the divine countdown. The request of the Greeks is like an exploding fuse. No more "not yet's". Instead, "the hour has come".

Throughout John's Gospel the universal scope of the gospel is clear. Jesus has come not just as redeemer of Israel. God's love is for the 'world' (3:16) and the sacrifice, light and life of Jesus are for all (1:29, 4:42, 6:33, 8:12). With the coming of the Greeks, the hour has come for Jesus to be 'glorified' (v.23), to be 'lifted up' (v.32). References to sacrifice and death make it clear that Jesus recognised the enquiry of these non-Jewish blokes signifying that events were entering their final stages.

Reading: John 12:20–33

Reflection

Where are we seeing signs of life? And where do things seem dead? We arrive at the 5th Sunday of Lent. Next week will be Palm Sunday and the journey through Holy Week begins. As such, today's focus passage from John feels almost like a summary of where we are and a road map for where we are going in the next few weeks.

Have you ever had that phone call just before you head out of the door that you know is going to bring news that you just wish you could avoid? Maybe we could wonder if that was how the Greeks felt when they approached the disciples to see if they could have an audience with Jesus. No doubt these seeking, God-fearing Greeks had a few questions to ask of Jesus, but would they have expected or been prepared for what would come? It is reminiscent of besotted fans, finally meeting their idol, and finding the object of their infatuation distracted and distant. Why does John give us this reaction from Jesus to the approach by the Greeks?

The message was spreading. Jesus should have been cool with that. A clue comes in the harvest language of seeds and new life. Here a trigger point has arrived with the appearance of the Greeks, and Jesus recognises that things are “going viral”. That also means that the powers that be will want to stop the dissemination of the good news, and even more so, the source of the good news himself. Jesus summarises what is coming, and here Jesus will soon be physically vulnerable - yet the conviction that Jesus has shown throughout his ministry remains firm. It is a steadfastness that is affirmed by the thunderous voice of God, letting those who were present understand what was going on. You can imagine the sideways glances of the Greeks to each other. Jesus speaks of being lifted up from the earth, drawing all people towards him. Just as with the affirmation of God’s love for all the world - and therefore with all people - in John 3:16, so here we also have an affirmation that the good news is not just for some, **but for all people.**

For in this family there are no outsiders. All are insiders and all are children of our heavenly Father. The rich, the poor, the lame, the blind, the clever, the not so clever, the first peoples, second peoples and all colours of skin. All!

Signs of life? Signs of death? Yes, some things need to die, so that the ground is replenished and something new can grow. Out of death comes life. After winter there is spring. Giving thanks and letting go of last summer’s stories, letting them rest in an underground, productive winter will enable new life in Spring and growth beyond what we could imagine.

Keep on looking and keep on hoping, for God lives on today, working away to bring about our wholeness, our reconciliation, our peace and our life in abundance. Jesus says “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself”. Yes, Jesus will take us on the journey through life here on earth and life eternal, as we read today. Be lifted up. You are not forgotten. Never!



Keep on looking and keep on hoping, for God lives on today.

A song to sing or to read: My song is love unknown

My Song is love unknown, My Saviour's love to me
love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
my Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

He came from His blest throne salvation to bestow
but all made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But oh, my Friend! My friend indeed
who at my need His life did spend.

They rise and needs will have my dear Lord made away
a murderer they save, the Prince of life they slay.
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes
that He His foes from thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine
never was love, dear King, never was grief like Thine.
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

Lyrics and Music in the public domain



Closing Prayer

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; may you be rooted and grounded in love; may you grasp the full breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ; may you know that love, which surpasses knowledge; may you be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. **Amen**

With thanks to Rev Mel Graham for preparing today's reflection



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