

**“The Decision”**

John 12: 20-33

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

**A couple of Greeks wanted to talk.** Our scripture passage today starts with Jesus’ disciple Phillip being asked by some Greeks if they could see Jesus. Phillip mentions it to Andrew and together they tell Jesus that there are some Greek people who want to see him. After this exchange, the conversation changes completely.

**A confusing start:** We are confused because Jesus talks about something that has nothing to do with the matter at hand. Jesus does not say he does not have time to talk with the Greeks, but he says something off topic: ***Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23).*** Then he talks about a seed needing to die if it is to bring life in an abundant way, and about losing one’s life if one is going to gain it. Jesus is deeply shaken to the extent that he prays to his Father about the possibility of saving him from his upcoming suffering and death.

**Jesus is distracted by what lies ahead.** The disciples are confused by Jesus’ answer and the Greeks must be getting impatient. The fact of the matter is that Jesus is facing his impending suffering, and he must decide whether he is going to run from it or face it. This decision is something of much more weight on Jesus’ mind than the request of these Greeks.

**What will Jesus decide?** Will Jesus run to save his life, or will he lose his life and in so doing save it? Jesus is called to be the grain of wheat that must die before it can live. As followers of Christ, we are also called to be the grain of wheat that must die before we can truly live. Can we accept that for ourselves?

**Jesus concludes that he must decide to do the right thing.**

***“Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12: 25).*** That is the path he chose and the needed spiritual wisdom for us today moving forward with our daily lives.

**A story about making such a decision:** A story is told about a man named Sundar from the Indian Sikh community. He became a Christian and decided to stay in India to be a missionary for Christ to his people. One afternoon Sundar was travelling on foot with a Buddhist monk high in the Himalayas. It was becoming quite cold, night was coming on, and the monk said that if they did not get to the monastery before darkness they could freeze to death.

As they were crossing over a high narrow ledge, they heard a cry for help. Deep down in the ravine they saw a man who had fallen and was wounded. He could not walk because he had

broken his leg. The monk urged Sundar not to stop because God has brought this man to his fate and he needs to work it out himself. This is the tradition he said. He urged Sundar to hurry on the trail before they perished. Sundar objected and said it was his tradition that God has brought him here to save the wounded man. Sundar said he would not abandon his hurting brother.

The monk continued on, and Sundar went down the ravine to help the man. Sundar took a blanket from his knapsack and wrapped the man's leg in a sling. He then hoisted the man on to his back and made the difficult journey back up the ravine. After trudging up the path and making it again to the top, Sundar was drenched with perspiration, and then struggled to make progress through the heavy falling snow. He could hardly find the path, but persisted in spite of being fatigued and overheated. Then he saw the lights of the monastery – he was almost there! A moment later he nearly stumbled and fell. Not because he was weak, but because he tripped over a large object on the path. He bent down and brushed the snow to see the body of the monk who had frozen to death and so close to the monastery. Then while kneeling in the snow, he said the scripture softly to himself: *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it (New International Version).”* He understood what Jesus meant and was glad that he had made the decision to ‘lose his life’ for the wounded man.

**The importance of becoming like a grain of wheat:** In making this decision and living by it, you will be giving room for the Holy Spirit to form you closer to being your true self. On a daily basis, as you practise dying to yourself, you will prefer the things of God over the things of this world – and that is liberating! How have you put yourself aside for the sake of others? Are you dying to a life of self-preservation and living to defend and help your neighbours?

**What must we decide to let go of in order to grow?** Our gospel for today from John 12: 20-33 pulls us away from world distractions and makes us face what we do not naturally like to face. We start with the question: Who are we? Answer: We are children of God, and as imitators of Christ, we are called to put ourselves aside and even die for the needs and healing of others. But, what is holding us back from growing in Christ? Perhaps you have not decided to lose your life to save it. On the other hand, we may have decided a long time ago, but we waver back and forth because that choice will cause discomfort and pain. That is okay because God knows that feeling too. As we know from our story, Christ in His humanity also wrestled with the decision. People of God, like Jesus did-- say yes –and remember you are not alone! Pray for God's strength to help you fulfill the task of losing your life to gain it.

It is decision time! That is what the Gospel is basically about. Like Jesus in our passage today, though not easy, we are being challenged to make the decision. We are all called to follow Christ and lose our lives so that we can save it. What's your decision? Amen.