

**5 Lent – Year B – March 29, 2009**  
**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51: 1-13; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

One of the best parts of Bible study is that we get share thoughts and ideas with one another. We are all at different places in our walk with Jesus. And even though we are part of this community, the circumstances of our lives are unique. Several years ago I was part of a mid-week Bible study group that I remember with great affection for the openness and humor with which we shared how the Lord was working in our lives. One evening there was a passage, perhaps this one from the Gospel of John, in which the word “glory” was used repeatedly. It was hard not to notice the word, and I will always remember my friend’s story about God’s glory. By any standard, Lisa is a very successful woman, a Spanish professor, and a woman of tremendous faith. Yet Lisa was born with limited vision that quickly deteriorated to blindness. In her late teens, there was a ray of hope for her medical condition. Her doctors told her that there was a slim possibility that they could restore partial vision in her eyes. The surgery was risky, however, and painful. Lisa prayed and prayed to God about whether to have the life-changing operation or not.

Today’s Gospel lesson opens with some Greeks who are seeking out Jesus. The curiosity of the Greeks was well known in the popular culture of Jesus’ day. It was a time of discovery and the Hellenistic influence was firmly established in the everyday life of first century Palestine. The Greeks who came to worship at the Temple may also have been Jewish proselytes. They find Philip and ask to see Jesus. We’ve met Philip before. He’s the one who goes to Nathanael and tells him about Jesus, inviting him to “come and see”. Philip is also the disciple who seeks out Andrew at the feeding of the five thousand. He again goes after Andrew to figure out what to do about the request from the Greeks to see Jesus. That request is for far more than a casual meeting, they are looking to interview and question Jesus about His ministry and teachings.

In a Gospel filled with signs for you and me to see, hear and understand, Jesus’ response first sounds a little strange. It isn’t what we might expect, based on the request to see Jesus. Given Jesus’ gift for hospitality, we might think that His response would have been along the lines of “Sure, tell them to come over for dinner”. In fact, Jesus doesn’t answer his waiting disciples at all. Instead He embarks on a prayerful soliloquy reflecting on this final stage of His ministry and his impending glorification by God. He puts into new words a teaching we have already heard about dying to self in order to bear fruit for God. He tells us, once again, the true nature of discipleship and service. Then Jesus shares how troubled He is in the depths of His soul. It is the same disturbed feeling Jesus has at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus before He calls him forth from the dead. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, there is no Garden of Gethsemane scene in the Gospel of John. This is as close as John goes to describing how Jesus feels and deals with His situation. The passage sounds rather like Jesus is considering His options in the full knowledge and awareness of what it means to be a human being facing certain death. We have moved with Jesus in rapid succession from a request by some Greek visitors to see Him, to the moment of intense realization that His earthly time is now very short. Somehow the coming of the Greeks is a sign to Jesus that His hour has come.

This moment in Jesus’ life is a fulfillment of the promise that the prophet Isaiah speaks about, “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:3). Where Israel’s torch was dimmed through corrupt leadership and poor teaching, the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, will complete in His person God’s purpose to reconcile all the world to God’s self. The history of salvation is about to reach its pinnacle of grace and love. The Greeks, representatives of all the nations of the world have come to see Jesus. From the opening of the Gospel of John, Jesus has been found doing the work that God sent Him to do, knowing that His hour was not yet come, yet always knowing that His hour would come, and now it is here.

“And what should I say?” Jesus questions Himself, “Father, save me from this hour?” No, he is resolute in aligning His will with God’s will, even in the most terrible moments of His life. Begging God to be saved from the hour for which His whole life has been leading towards is not an option. Instead, Jesus prays that God’s name be glorified. He does not seek to save Himself, because His life, your life, and my life, each reach their fullest and greatest potential in serving God’s will to the glory of God’s name. From the earliest part of the Gospel of John, Jesus is seen and known as the glory of God’s only Son. Jesus’ presence in the world is a sign of God’s glory. Each of Jesus’ miraculous deeds is a sign of God’s glory, and His death will also be for the glorification of God. Jesus’ whole life is summed up as one which glorifies God’s name. Our Christian hope lies in the promise that we too will see the glory of God in the life to come, and participate in it with our Lord Jesus. To give glory to God is to worship God, and to praise God. It is also to celebrate and adore God, or as we often say before we bring the gifts of bread, wine, and our other offerings to the Table, “Ascribe to the Lord the honor due His name”. We glorify God when we honor God’s name in our thoughts, words, and actions. In the Hebrew, glory means “weight” or “importance” – words that show the significance of God. There is nothing and no one more important than God, who sustains each of us moment by moment. As Jesus tells us in this passage from John, worshipping God is the reason He has come to this hour.

In a voice from heaven, God speaks; assuring Jesus that God is glorified and will be glorified again. The voice, that is the glory of God, was meant to be heard by all present. Some did hear the words, others heard a deep rumbling like thunder, and some thought it was the voice of an angel speaking to Jesus. Then Jesus tells the crowd that “now is the judgment of this world.” God’s judgment of this world is revealed to all in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Sin and death are trampled by Jesus’ self-sacrifice, and scandalous death on a cross. I suspect this is not quite the path to glory that you or I would have chosen if we had written this script. Seeing, hearing, and knowing the presence of God in a cruel and torturous death is not usually how we imagine scenes of glory. Nevertheless, Jesus’ path to glory, and one that you and I must follow, **is** the way of the cross.

A few minutes ago, when we left Lisa, she was praying to God trying to discern whether to risk the surgery on her eyes or not. She chose to talk about God’s glory during our Bible study, because she received a sign from God that changed her life. During one of her many prayers, she felt the presence of God’s glory with her, enfolding her in great peace, comforting her troubled soul. God spoke to her, just as God spoke to Jesus. God told her that whatever the outcome of the surgery, she was God’s beloved child, and nothing and no one could take that away from her. She said that at that moment, she realized that her fears were groundless, and she put herself into God’s hands with complete trust and confidence. For Lisa the path became very clear. In that instant, the assurance of God’s love meant more to her than absolutely everything else in her life. With the strength of that promise from God, she went ahead with the surgery and now, with the aid of special contact lenses and reading glasses, Lisa is even able to see well enough for daytime driving. It doesn’t matter that no one else heard the voice Lisa heard, or felt God’s presence that day. Just as some heard God’s voice as thunder, still others as the voice of an angel, and a few who heard God’s promise to glorify God’s name again, it is a sign of God’s glory. As we complete our Lenten walk and find ourselves in Jerusalem with the Lord, you and I don’t have to ask to see Jesus – His gracious presence is already here.

Amen.