

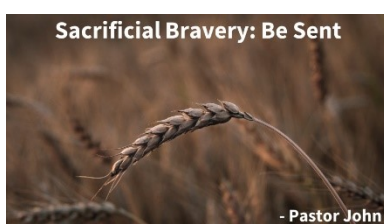
Sacrificial Bravery: Be Sent

March 21, 2021

John 12: 20-33

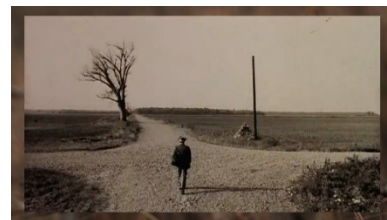
²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ "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. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.



Let us pray...

Psalm 51 is one of the lectionary readings for this week. Please turn to this Psalm as we begin this morning. David writes this prayer to God in the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba. David's great sin has led him to a place of deep repentance. David begins in verse one, *"Have mercy on me, O God"*. He continues in the next verse, *"Wash me thoroughly... cleanse me from my sin"*. You can feel his need for forgiveness, to be made right again. But do you remember how David got to this place of repentance and confession? The prophet Nathan was sent by God to confront David for his sin. It was then that David has this moment – be angry at God for calling him into account... or admit his guilt, bow low before the Lord, seek his mercy and grace. It was a crossroads for David – to be mighty king or humble servant? The reading closes in verses ten through twelve with these words: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God... Do not cast me away from your presence... Restore to me the joy of your salvation"*. David chose humble servant. David chose the path of confession, repentance, he chose to enter into a right relationship with God once again.



Now, turn with me to Jeremiah 31. This section is entitled "The Joyful Return of the Exiles" in my Bible. A little background first. The Israelites had again broken the covenant. They chose other gods and were defeated and led off into exile. What to do? It was a crossroads for God. He was angry with his people for not loving him, for breaking the covenant, for damaging their relationship. God too has this crossroads moment – be angry or forgive, offer mercy or deliver justice? Admit the weakness of his creatures, subject his love to their frailty, call the stubborn and strong-willed children back into relationship?

Yes, God still loved Israel, his people. In verse three God says, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love;*

therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you". In

the lectionary reading for this week, in verses 31-34,

God promises a new covenant. In verse 31 God says, *"The days are coming...*

when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of

Judah". The covenant is explained in verse 33: *"I will put my law within them,*

and I will write it on their hearts". God will give his children a gift: his ways will be written on their minds and it will be in their hearts. One day was the promise.

Jesus came to establish the new covenant. Through Jeremiah God promised,

"They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest". Last week's

habit was to invest twenty minutes delving into one of the gospels, twenty

minutes marinating ourselves in Jesus. *"They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest".* What did you learn about Jesus?



To learn about Jesus today, let us turn to John 12. The overall theme of passage from John 12 is that after Jesus is resurrected, he will draw everyone to himself.

Passage begins with a request to see Jesus. Instead of inviting the Greeks to

come and meet him, Jesus addresses his immediate disciples. In verse 23 Jesus

says, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified".* Jesus knows that

he must begin his walk towards his final time in Jerusalem, towards the cross. In

this moment, at this crossroads, Jesus speaks of the

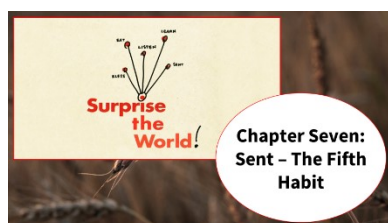
analogy of the wheat. In verse 24 Jesus says, *"Unless a*

grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains

just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit".



If one single seed dies, then it will bring life to many new plants. In a similar way, one man will die, bringing life to many.

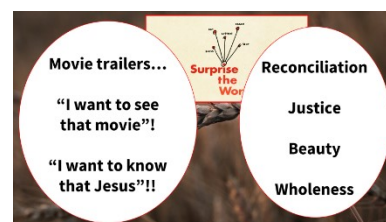


In Surprise the World the seventh chapter is titled, "Sent: The Fifth Habit". Author Michael Frost begins by returning to the overall mission of Christians: to alert

others to the reign and rule of God through Christ. Frost then likens our lives to movie trailers. It is a great analogy. Think of some of the great trailers that you have seen. These sneak previews the latest, greatest movie feature the highlights, the special effects, the romantic moments. If the trailer has done its job well, we are left thinking to ourselves, *"I want to see that movie"*! In the same way, if we live out highly questionable lives, we will draw the kingdom of God near. Imagine if we lived our lives in such a way that the people that we encounter were left thinking, *"I want to know that Jesus"*!



In this fifth habit, Frost encourages us to journal, to note the ways and places that we have observed the reign and rule of God being present in the world and in our lives. In the book he points to four ways that God works in the world that we should take note of. The four ways are reconciliation, justice, beauty, and wholeness. The first is reconciliation. Ultimately the purpose of the cross is to reconcile humanity back to God. Reconciliation was the heart of Psalm 51: David wanted to be reconciled back to God. Reconciliation was the heart of Jeremiah 31: God wanted to be reconciled with his people.



With relationships that we value, reconciliation is something we practice too. We witness to the power of reconciliation when we mend a relationship, when we share Jesus with another person, and they experience his mercy and grace.

Closely related to reconciliation is the practice of justice. Since Jesus set the example, Christians have long known the call to stand for the weak and the powerless, for the marginalized and disadvantaged. This call to those in need is seated deeply in the roots of our Methodist tradition. John Wesley championed the plight of the poor in England, bringing thousands to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Long before preaching the good news to them, Wesley visited those in prison, established school and orphanages, brought clothes and food to the lowest in society. Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela are others who have stood for justice and equality. We stand in this tradition.

Beauty is the third way that God is revealed in the world. Beauty seems odd to list after reconciliation and justice, right? To me, beauty is the natural expression of God in the world – the stars at night, a sunrise over mountains, the field of wildflowers, that hymn four Sundays ago. They are moments when we are suddenly in God's presence. Inviting others into God's created world and into places where they can experience God in a transcendent way are practices that draw kingdom near.

Wholeness is the fourth way that Frost points us towards. In the gospels we find story after story about Jesus giving sight to the blind, cleansing to the lepers, returning the prostitute and tax collector to community. These were all acts that brought healing and restoration and wholeness to people's lives.

Today Jesus heals marriages and friendships, brings victory over addictions and compulsions, provides the way out of hopeless and dead-end lives. In turn, he leads us to help families rebuild after fires and natural disasters, to walk alongside others through grief and loss, to be in the business of bringing wholeness to people's lives.



Sacrificial Bravery: Be Sent

Again, again, this is our call – to die to self, to give up our rights, to sacrificially serving others. As we seek to practice these habits, we seek to serve the other by lightening their loads, strengthening their arms, alleviating their burdens. Lent calls us to walk the path of self-denial and to place the needs of others ahead of our own. In response to this call, I ask: Do we go where Jesus would have gone today? I ask in the light of last week's habit - to learn Jesus. Do we seek to be an active part of the spirit found in Psalm 51? Are we seeking to help people to be reconciled to God?

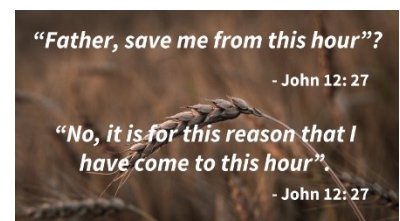
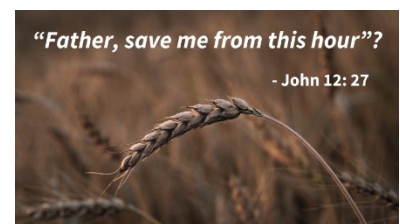
Returning to the gospel story, picking up again in verse 27, as Jesus kneels in the Garden of Gethsemane, he is troubled. The human Jesus is scared, worried, fearful. When the Spirit has spoken into our hearts, asking us to speak to or bless that person, nudging us to bring food or to invite another to the table, whispering direction and guidance into our lives in those moments of solitude... were we not a little scared, worried, fearful?

This night in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus ponders what lies ahead, he considers the consequences of the subversive movement of love that he has led these past three years. The human Jesus faces a choice: turn away from the city, away from the center religious and political power, away from the place where his preaching, where his anti-imperial, anti-establishment message is most needed. Or he can walk towards certain death, becoming a powerful witness against the oppressive violence of humanity and against the selfish concerns of the religious leaders.



Can you imagine the thoughts that would go through your mind if you were kneeling in Jesus' place? 'Is this really worth it? Couldn't I make more of an impact if I just kept teaching them about God's love? Do I have to face down the power of Pilate and Herod and the religious leaders? Am I really ready to give my life for others?' In the moment when we would surely ask these questions, in this moment when Jesus' fragile human nature is on full display, we see the divine power and strength within him rise up.

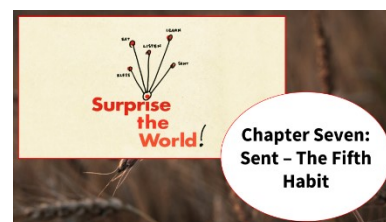
At this crossroads, Jesus faces a choice. In verse 27 he asks, "*Father, save me from this hour*"? Jesus quickly denies this human side of himself. In this same verse he says, "*No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour*". Affirming his decision God speaks from heaven, assuring Jesus of his coming glory. With this assurance Jesus will leave the Garden, returning to Jerusalem to begin the journey to the cross.



Jesus chooses the hard path. Jesus chooses to stand with extraordinary bravery in the face of death, in the face of such stark consequences so that the message of love will be heard. Jesus does not choose the easy road, the road of least resistance. Jesus chooses to walk the road that will transform the world, even though the life must fall to the ground, even though the life must give itself as a ransom for many. In this moment Jesus chooses to walk back into the city, to stare the oppressors in the eye, to shine a spotlight on the corrupt ways of the religious system. Jesus chooses to be brave, to be the sacrifice, to be the gift that transforms humanity forever.

As we walk this Lenten journey towards the cross, may we take the time to reflect on the sacrificial bravery of Jesus Christ. Frost encourages us to journal, to record our experiences with the holy and to note when we are in mission to others.

There are three reasons that this is a good habit. First, it helps us to process our efforts and to be more intentional about practicing drawing the kingdom of God near. Second, it shows us how God is using us to reveal his reign and rule in the world. It shows us how we matter for and to God and it gives us encouragement to continue to be used by God. Third, it will lead us to ask and ponder important questions concerning God and our faith and our relationship with God. Journaling prevents us going on “autopilot”. Fourth, as we journal about how we are sent to the world, we begin to see ourselves differently, as missionaries, and ones sent into the world to bring others to Christ.

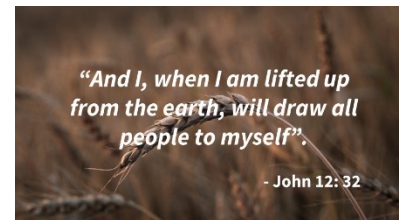




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May we remember that he is like us and we are like he was this night in John 12 – distressed and perplexed, fearful of the choices that lie in front of us, presented with the choice to stand up and speak out or to remain complacent and comfortable. At the crossroads, Jesus chose to rely on the power of God and to walk the difficult road. In doing so, Jesus was able to transform the world for good.

The passage for today closes with these words: *"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"*. He is speaking of his death here. Jesus is speaking of the one who will die so that many can have life. He is also speaking of the power of his love. It is love that draws us to Jesus.



"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself".

- John 12:32

Why does Jesus draw everyone to him? Why is the good news good news? Jesus offers forgiveness to those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel. Jesus promises eternal life to those who hate their lives in this world. Jesus offers reconciliation, justice, beauty, and wholeness to all who call on him as Lord and Savior. We are sent into the world to share this Jesus, this good news, with a world in need. As we go forth into the world, may we each practice sacrificial bravery, offering all of ourselves for the transformation of the world. May we go where Jesus would go, bearing witness to his great love. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you reflect on the habits that we have been practicing, which have helped you grow most in your faith? How could you “up” your game?
- 2) *Pray*. When you reflect on being sent into the world in mission, where do you most need God’s guidance and strength? Take it to him in prayer!
- 3) *Study*. Read John 12: 44-50. How do these words encourage your belief in Jesus? How do they affect your desire to share your faith with others?