

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent Reading Reflection and Prayers

### Reflection by Alyce McKensie Patheos

When we go on vacation, I'm content to wander around and take things as they come. My husband is more of a planner. He likes to have specific destinations when we visit an area. He likes to have a reason—we have come to see this attraction or that. It sounds like the Greeks were planners. They didn't just wander to Passover to stroll around town. It sounds like Jesus may have been the whole reason for their trip. They first approach Philip. "We wish to see Jesus." "Yeah, you and everybody else," may have been his internal response. "Take a number and get in line."

But he utters no such negative remarks. Instead, he institutes a first-century version of a phone tree. You know the phone tree. You call to speak with a particular person and are given multiple phone prompts while you wait more or less patiently and never do get to speak to the person you were hoping to speak to, the person who was the whole reason for the call. "Please hold while I consult with Andrew," and then, "Please hold while we consult with Jesus." It's a first-century version of "Your call is important to us. All of our operators are currently serving other customers. You will be served by the first available operator." ... As best as I can tell from the text, the Greeks never do get an audience with Jesus. I picture them still standing behind the yellow line, still waiting for their table.

That must have been disappointing for them. They had probably approached Philip because he had some Greek connections. He and Andrew were the only two disciples known by distinctively Greek names. In everyday life, sometimes people seek us out with regard to matters of faith, because they see something we have in common. Or maybe we seem approachable or like a good listener. We need to be careful that we don't make them wait behind a yellow line. There may be a reason of which we're not aware that has drawn them to us to be the ones that introduce them to Jesus.

But suppose the Greeks had been close enough to overhear Jesus' response to the news that they were waiting to see him. They were hoping for, "By all means, show them in." But that's not what they get. It's always revealing when someone talks about you without realizing you can hear them. If they had been in earshot, the Greeks would have learned that, in Jesus' mind, their arrival had far more importance than they realized. Their arrival signals that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus has

pointed to this hour (2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25; 7:30; 8:20) as an event that was in the offing but had not yet arrived. Their visit signals that that hour has come. They are like the first kernel of popcorn that pops. In Jewish thought the death of a martyr was regarded as bearing much fruit. It benefited others and the nation as a whole. So Jesus' death will produce "much fruit," as the whole world is drawn to the salvation and life it brings about (12:32). Just before the Greeks' visit, in John 12:19, the Pharisees make an accurate assessment of the situation: " You see you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

Continuing to listen in, the Greeks would hear a lesson in discipleship. If you want to follow Jesus, understand that you must be, like him, a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies in order to bear much fruit. You cannot hoard your life (*psyche* in Greek, *nephesh* in Hebrew), making your survival your goal. You must have a higher allegiance, one born out of belief in and following the Son of Man who is glorified and who glorifies God in his crucifixion and resurrection. A similar aphorism is found in Mark 8:35, Matthew 16:25, and Luke 17:33. Here in John this advice on discipleship is set in a Christological context. Jesus is the supreme example of one who finds by losing, who brings a great harvest by dying.

We aren't exactly sure why the Greeks sought Jesus out. They said they wanted to "see" Jesus. In John "seeing" is code for understanding, for illumination. They wanted to see Jesus and presumably, to follow him. With his lesson on discipleship they've just overheard, perhaps their thoughts go to what they need to lose in order to live for him, experiences they've had of self-centred living that have shrunk their souls.

Continuing to listen in, they hear John's version of Gethsemane. It is quite different from the synoptic versions. In all three Jesus prays that this cup (and in Mark, this hour) might pass from him. While in Luke he kneels in quiet dignity, in Mark and Matthew, he throws himself to the ground in his anguish. John, by contrast, emphasizes Jesus' equanimity. While Jesus admits that "his soul is troubled, he immediately goes on to ring a change on Mark's version of Gethsemane (14:35, "If it is possible, let this hour pass from me."). In John, Jesus says, "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" (12:27).

The Greeks are not done overhearing. Now a voice from heaven comes for their benefit and that of the crowd. "I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again." In Mark, Jesus' glory is a future thing. It will be revealed when the Son of Man returns on the clouds of heaven. In John the glory is imminent. It inheres in the crucifixion-resurrection viewed together. The opportunity for

participation or rejection begins now. The world judges and condemns the Son of Man. God uses the cross to lift him up for the salvation of the world.

It doesn't seem as if the crowd gets what the voice has revealed to them.

But maybe the Greeks did. Maybe they achieved the initial purpose of their visit—to "see" Jesus.

Jesus, interpreting the voice to the crowds, reminds them that "the light will be with them for a little longer." He orders them to walk in the light, to believe in the light so that they can become children of light (12:36).

If the Greeks listened and absorbed what they heard while waiting for their table to be ready, they did indeed see and hear Jesus, and thereby, they saw what their path would be if they became his followers. They heard a grain of wheat hitting the ground. They saw a rich harvest that came from that grain. They heard a cross being lifted to the sky. They saw a vision of all people drawn to that cross. They saw a light dawn on their path and beckon them onto it, to walk in the light as children of light.

### **Prayers for Lent 5 March 21<sup>st</sup> 2021, written by Bridget Hugh-Jones.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you were lifted up on the cross for our salvation, help us to triumph over evil and to do good.. to give ourselves to you, as you give yourself to us

Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer

You come to meet us Lord, long before we search for you... make your church a gateway to encountering your presence and glory. Strengthen our faith as we begin to think about worshipping once again in our church buildings.... Help us to share the good news that by knowing you and loving you, we find perfect freedom.

Lord in your mercy ... hear our prayer

You come to meet us Lord amidst the struggles and tensions of life.... Give us all courage to stand for justice and peace. As we near the end of this season of Lent, give us renewed determination to give ourselves more fully to you, to make time for prayer and study of your word, and to encourage one another in these difficult times

Lord in your mercy.... Hear our prayer

You come to meet us Lord in times of faithfulness and failure.. give us grace to confront the darkness within and to embrace your new life. We pray for all leaders of the nations, for all who make decisions that affect others. We remember with thanks all who have been generous to us, all who have shared their lives with us, our families, friends, neighbours, colleagues, praying especially at this time for those whom we have been unable to see in person for so long.

Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer

You come to meet us Lord in strength and in weakness...we pray for all who are anxious or distressed. We pray for all who are sick in any way, and for those who care for them. We hold before you all who are persecuted for their beliefs or principles, for all victims and offenders... we pray for all who are suffering as a result of this pandemic, whether physically, emotionally or financially. In a moment of silence, we pray for all those in need of your healing touch upon their lives, whether known to ourselves or known to you alone... *(keep a short silence..)*

Lord in your mercy.... Hear our prayer

You come to meet us Lord in your cross and resurrection... draw to yourself all who have died. We remember loved ones who have entered into eternal life and join with them to sing your praise. *(we pray today especially for the soul of.....)*

Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer

Rejoicing in the fellowship of St Patrick, St. Joseph, St. Cuthbert, St Levan, St Buryan, St Sennen, we commend ourselves and all Christian people to your unfailing love Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.