

John 12:20–26
Holy Tuesday
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 26, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

On this Holy Tuesday, we consider the part of our Gospel text from John 12 where some Greeks who are in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover desire to see Jesus. The term “Greeks” here doesn’t necessarily mean these men came from the modern-day country of Greece. “Greek” was simply a reference to any Gentile, anyone who wasn’t Jewish. Philip is from Bethsaida, a hellenized city, a city inundated with Gentiles. Perhaps these Greeks were from Bethsaida or somewhere else in Galilee? Maybe they knew Philip, or at least that they could access Jesus through Philip.

The Greeks say to Philip: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” In the Gospel of John, to see does not just mean to catch a glimpse or shake hands with a celebrity. To see in John is much deeper. It involves trust, the eyes of faith, a firm belief that Jesus is who He reveals Himself to be as the Son of God the Father. The Greeks are drawn to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and as the savior of the whole world. They, too, seek to follow Jesus.

Philip told Andrew and Andrew and Philip went to tell Jesus. Jesus knows that the time has come for the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile to be broken down. As Paul says in Ephesians 2: In Christ Jesus, those who were “once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:13–14). That’s why Jesus answers the request from the Greeks with a reference to His own glorification, which comes in His death on the cross.

Jesus answered them: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Here Jesus is referring to Himself. He is the seed of woman, the seed of Abraham. He is the seed that will bear much fruit. But first the seed must, in a sense, die. If a farmer decides to keep his seed in storage containers and never plant it, he won’t get a crop that year. If you leave the grass seed sitting in the bag in your garage, then the yard will remain bare. Like so many things, seed is something you have to do something with in order to make it work. If you greedily hold onto it, then you’re missing the point and losing out on the ultimate purpose. The seed must be buried in the ground for it to grow, to develop, and eventually to produce fruit. True life can only come from death.

Here, Jesus is referring to His own suffering, death, and burial. He is the seed who will die and then be placed into the ground. Jesus would be planted in the garden tomb. But on the Third day, He would rise again from the dead in His glorious, resurrected body. The seed would sprout and grant abundant life to many. What seemed small and insignificant, weak and precarious, would be transformed into something magnificent. After Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world, He would rise to newness of life that He might grant eternal life to all who hold to Him in faith. Like a beautiful lily that springs from a dirty bulb or like a full crop that

comes from tiny seeds planted in the ground, so is our Lord's resurrection and so will be your resurrection from the dead as well. What is sown in mortality will be raised immortal, never to die again. What is sown perishable will become imperishable. That which is taken in death will be restored a hundredfold in eternity.

Jesus continues with a lesson on how His death and resurrection influences your life right now: "Whoever loves his life will lose it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Those who only live for this world, for the pleasures of this life, will forfeit their life in eternity. They will meet eternal death. But those who despise the sinful condition in which they find themselves, those who repent of their sins and seek the true life in Jesus Christ, who is the life, they will have the full life in eternity. Those who focus only on this life are like those who hold on to the seed. The seed is nice. It's beautiful. It brings much pleasure in having it. But unless the seed is sacrificed and cast into the ground it will perish forever. Those who wish to hold onto this life alone will lose everything. But those who go out on a limb and cast the seed into the ground will reap an abundant harvest. You can't see that now. You can only trust in God's promise that He will give the growth. Live not for today but for eternal life in Jesus Christ. This thinking in terms of death and resurrection will then change everything about how you order your day to day life.

This passage about the death of the seed was used by Russian author, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, both as the epigraph on his tombstone and as the epigraph of his famous work, *The Brothers Karamazov*. The lesson learned by the hero, Alyosha, can be summarized with this passage in the background. Alyosha's mentor at the monastery, Father Zossima, says it like this: "Remember that [verse, John 12:24] . . . Life will bring you many misfortunes, but you will find your happiness in them, and will bless life and make others bless it—which is what matters most." Because of the harvest, the painful act of casting off the seed makes for joy. Because of eternal life, the painful act of casting off the sins and the burdens that weigh us down brings joy to the Christian. Jesus is the model of this resurrection life. After His suffering came glory, so that after your suffering will come glory as well.

Jesus says: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him." Jesus already served you and by grace has made you a servant. You are a servant of Jesus Christ and you follow Him in His passion, in His rejection, in His suffering, and in His death. But where He is, there will you be as well, not only in suffering, but in the glory that follows the shame. Serve the Lord. Follow Him wherever He leads and the Father will reward you here in time and there in eternity. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.