

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, B
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:20-33

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It's wonderful when a project comes together. But sometimes it takes a while to get there.

Last summer we got into a pandemic home repair project that seemed like it would never end. It started in June with needing to replace our roof, which was so old the insurance company had started to protest. When the roofers came they had to strip off three layers of shingles, and in the process they accidentally gouged two holes through the upstairs ceiling. The roof company went through two different handymen before they found someone to make it right, two months later. And of course we had to replace the gutters. And in the process discovered the whole top of our chimney was crumbling away. Who knew? While the chimney was being fixed there were the terrible fires and smoke, when outside work wasn't safe for anyone, so there was a delay. And just when we were ready to sign off on the chimney, we noticed crumbling mortar farther down that was somehow missed in the first estimate. Meanwhile the house painters came and found dry rot on the porch and worrying cracks in a cement wall, which required more research and didn't get repaired till February, long after the rest of the paint job was done.

But now, at last, we can finally see the end in sight. The house is in better repair than it has been in years. It's snug and safe, with no leaks and a whole new fresh look. And I have to say it is very satisfying to see the whole project coming together after all these months.

Our scripture today is about a magnificent project finally coming together. It's been a long time coming, but now the moment is at hand.

God began this marvelous project long ago, when God gave birth to a universe that would one day contain human beings, and God imagined carrying on a loving relationship with them. God began the project by reaching out to Abraham and Sarah. Over the centuries God made covenants with the Hebrew people. God said, *"I will write my law in your hearts. I will be your God and you will be my people."* And it was God's faithfulness that kept the project alive through times when human beings were *not* faithful, when they turned to other gods or abused the vulnerable people they were commanded to protect. God took the people back time after time, forgave them and

repaired the relationship and started again. It was God's steadfast love that kept the magnificent project going all those years, until the fullness of time when God's Son would complete it.

All through Jesus' life the suspense was mounting. Everyone could see his ministry was leading to something big. But time and again, Jesus said "Not yet." At the wedding in Cana, when the wine ran out, Mary asked for a miracle but Jesus said, "My hour has not yet come"(2:4). The disciples urged him to show his power in Jerusalem, but Jesus said, "My time has not yet come"(7:6). Two times, the officials were getting ready to arrest Jesus, but "his hour had not yet come" (7:30, 8:20).

Now, today, Jesus finally announces: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." God's magnificent project is about to be completed, as Jesus prepares to go to the cross.

Wait. That sounds strange. Jesus said he would be *glorified* on the *cross*. We usually think of the cross as a tragic event where God had to intervene and set things right. But John's gospel doesn't view the cross as a tragedy. Instead, the cross is a triumph. The cross is the whole reason for Jesus coming to earth. The cross is where everything comes together.

On the cross God accomplishes what God's been preparing since the beginning of time. Jesus says, "when I am lifted up [on the cross] I will draw all people to myself." That's it! That is the deepest desire of God's heart, for everyone to know God in loving relationship.

And it's already happening in today's scripture-- that's how Jesus knows his hour has come. He knows because "some Greeks" show up and tell the disciples: "We want to see Jesus." It's the symbolic moment Jesus has been waiting for. It means the whole world is now ready to receive him. If these "Greeks," these world travelers from across the sea, these lovers of trade and business and ideas... these historians, philosophers, seekers of truth... If these "Greeks" have crossed over from another culture with open hearts and minds and are now "wanting to see Jesus," then it's time for Jesus to be lifted up on the cross -- so everyone in the world can know him. Jesus' dying and rising will release God's saving power in a whole new way, across the nations and across the years.

I was still new in Portland when a young man made an appointment and sat down in my office to ask, "So, what is your church all about?" Then he looked at me expectantly,

waiting for an answer. He really wanted to know. And believe it or not, I had never been asked that question before. I grew up in times when most people knew what church was about. It's just part of the way the world has changed. A lot of people now don't grow up with a faith tradition – but that doesn't take away the hunger we all have for meaning and connection.

That young man was like the Greeks who said “We want to see Jesus” — a thinker, a questioner, a seeker with an open heart. Curious about who God might be for him. Hungry for something more than the cynicism and division and greed the world serves up. Hungry to tap into God's magnificent project, God's amazing, loving effort to draw all people into a life of hope and trust and courage and justice and forgiveness and self-giving love.

Because that's what God is continually about. Drawing people together through the irresistible love that radiates from Christ, drawing us to the cross and to the empty tomb where hope is born. And we are called to let all people know and feel that they truly have a place in God's grand design, a place in God's heart, a place in community with all who seek and find a home in the goodness of God's love.

This morning we count ourselves among the people who say, “We want to see Jesus.” Boy, do we ever! In the midst of violence, another senseless mass killing, we want to see Jesus. With hatred growing, assaults against Asian Americans and women, too many people dismissing this type of abuse – we want to see Jesus. In the midst of pandemic stress, we want to see Jesus. We want to see the shining face of a love stronger than death.

Today, we want to see Jesus. We want to receive our Lord in bread and wine. To hear stories of Jesus' life, and make them our stories. To sing songs of faith and make them our songs. We come to worship looking for a window into the Infinite Life that powers this whole universe, a glimpse of the God just beyond our view, a taste of the new world God is bringing into being.

We want to see Jesus – and the one who draws us here is Christ, who is determined to *be seen* -- by us and by everyone. Because God is still working at the glorious project started long ago. God is still writing God's name on human hearts, still forgiving our sin, still calling us God's treasured people. Still drawing us closer in Christ and sending us out each day to build a world of love and justice. God will be at this project until the whole human family is united in love that cannot die.

And now, as we move to the end of Lent, the hour is at hand for all of us. We are coming close to Holy Week, the holiest days when Christians around the world turn their eyes toward the cross, to see God glorified.

The hour has come to contemplate the deep mystery of Christ giving his life. This is the hour to be thankful in quiet prayer for a work of love that's really beyond our understanding. To be attentive as everything God has been working at through the centuries comes together. And let God's self-giving love be real and renewed in us.

It's all coming together. By God's power it does all come together. Amen.