

BIBLE READINGS: Jeremiah 31: 31-34 Hebrews 5:5-10 John 12:20-36

SERMON

Κυριε, τηλομεν τον Ιασουν ιδειν [Transliteration: kurie tyelomen ton lasoun idoun]. Did you catch that? It's right there in the scripture we just read. Didn't you hear it? Would it help if I repeated it? *Κυριε, τηλομεν τον Ιασουν ιδειν*. ... That didn't make it any clearer? Oh, I see the problem. What you heard earlier was an *English translation* of these words. Just now I was reading from the original, which is in common (not classical) *Greek*.

Of course, when I said "original," as in the "original" text being in *Greek*, actually I have to admit that we don't really have the "original." What we have are copies of the original, which no longer exists - at least not as far as we know. There weren't printing presses or copy machines back then. But even the real "original" from Gospel storyteller John - wherever it might be - is not fully "original" when it comes to the language in which it was "originally" written. The truth is, Jesus and his disciples were not Greeks. They were Palestinian Jews. The language of their faith was *Hebrew*, but their everyday tongue was *Aramaic*. So, if we were to hear the words of Jesus as he "originally" spoke them, we'd be listening to *Aramaic* or *Hebrew*. Which, if the truth be told, would make about as much sense to us this morning as the *Greek* phrase I spoke earlier.

However, even if we were all "experts" in *Greek*, *Aramaic*, and *Hebrew*, there is a lot in the Gospel that still seems to go over our head. When we say, "it's all *Greek* to me," we're not just talking about language.

Jesus said stuff that we still struggle to grasp. That was definitely true of those who first heard his words back then. They didn't know the rest of the story like we do, the part yet to be lived out before them. When Jesus said, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*," what were **they** to make of those words? Then again, what do **we** make of them, we who know about the Son of Man being lifted up on a cross? When Jesus spoke of a grain of wheat falling to earth and dying, but then going on to bear much fruit, the folks back then didn't have a clue that he was thinking about himself and his own pending death. They may have thought this was just another one of his nifty agricultural stories.

Before we get all high and mighty - thinking we know so much more than they did long ago because, after all, we've read the conclusion, we know how the story ends - we need to come back down to the ground and admit that we still struggle to comprehend it all. "*Those who love their life lose it*," Jesus said, "*and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life*." Explain that one to me in fifty words or less. Did he really mean that we're supposed to **hate** living in this world? Did Jesus **hate** living in this world? Did he walk around with a constant frown all the time, as if he were ready to get sick over everything he saw?

Is that how Jesus lived, always sick to his stomach of the sin which permeated the world he came to save? Is that what it means for us to "*hate (this) life*?" Are we to live dour lives, a frown perpetually on our lips? Well, that's how some have understood it, though I don't believe that's what Jesus meant. The "evil one" may be among us that way, perhaps suppressing disgust with a shallow smile, but that's not how Jesus lived. Nor, I believe, is that how we can live.

But what does it mean to "*hate (this) life*?" We struggle to understand. Does it mean that we need not be afraid to let go of our life, that we can live with open hands and arms instead of always trying to hold on to everything and everyone? Perhaps. Still, it's all *Greek* to us at times. What Jesus said next is easier to comprehend. He said, "*whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour*." Wonderful words, wouldn't you say? However, we know the rest of the story, don't we? And that may make it harder for us to grasp these words.

A servant must follow their master, he said. So where did Jesus go from that point? He headed to the cross. Hmm! It's one thing to serve, to wash someone's feet, to help build a family a home, to clean up after a disaster, to feed a meal to the homeless, to buy a goat or some other animal for those who could use it to feed themselves; it's one thing to serve in any of these ways. It's quite another to follow Jesus wherever he goes, especially when that "wherever he goes" involves suffering and death. Are **we** to be like that grain which dies? We can read what Jesus said in plain *English*, but it's still all *Greek* to us.

As we to continue listen to this story, we hear about a voice from heaven speaking the glory of God right there in the middle of that crowd. John says that some of the people thought it was a clap of thunder - the language of weather. Others thought it was the sound of angels - what language do **they** speak? Regardless, it was still all *Greek* to those people. Just like God's voice can still pretty much be a mystery to us when we hear it today. This voice of glory is often lost amid all the background noise of our daily life. And even if we do hear the sound - perhaps in the crunch of gravel beneath the feet of someone who is walking in a whole new direction after years of wandering from God - do we really understand?

"*This voice has come for your sake,*" Jesus told them back then. "*Now is the judgement of this world,*" he said. The *Greek* word John used for "judgement" is actually one we still use today. When a person's world is turned upside down, when he can no longer live it the same way he has in the past, when she runs into a difficult time which will forever change her, we say that such a person is facing a "crisis." That is the *Greek* word John used to convey what Jesus said. "*Now is the **crisis** (krisis) of this world.*"

Often, in the middle of facing into a crisis, we don't have a clue as to what is going on. The road signs could be written in *Greek*, for all that we understand of them. The world as we have known it is ripped away, and we have to find another way of living if we are to continue. Think of the pandemic - a crisis by any definition. A personal crisis - family - state - nation and the world all struggle with this horrible unseen, potentially death dealing virus. As wrenching as this is - terrifying, in fact - it is also a moment pregnant with possibility...

Think of your life right now as a big square block. How easy is it to move such a block? (Engineering types could probably come up with a 1001 ways of moving this block, but for most of us the prospect of pushing it is daunting.) The surface in contact with the ground makes it difficult.

Crisis times put this box of our lives on edge. There it teeters. In this position it's easy to move, isn't it? Of course, it can slip back into the place it once sat, though will everything be the same as it once was? Probably not. On the other hand, on its edge this box can move to a new place. Jesus said, with a touch of glory in his voice, "*Now is the **crisis** of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be driven out.*"

Now, I know the world is not shaped like a box, but what Jesus was aiming to do was to put things on edge. However, unlike some who prefer the world to be constantly that way, Jesus had a clear purpose beyond merely creating chaos. "*And I,*" he said, "*when I am lifted up from the earth* (he was speaking about his death upon the cross), *I will draw all people to myself.*" The purpose of this time of crisis - the purpose of the cross - was for all people to be drawn to God through it. Even those Greeks who came to Philip asking about Jesus.

Do you recall that part of John's story? Here Jesus and his disciples were all in Jerusalem for the festival leading up to Passover, and out of nowhere came some foreigners from Greece. The way John tells it, these were not Jews who just happened to be living in Greece and had returned home for this celebration. No, these were people who, at this point in their life journey, were seeking God. This Jewish stuff was all *Hebrew* to them. But as they

wander, something has drawn them to this moment and place, even if they haven't much of an idea what it is that has pushed or pulled them.

One thing you need to know is that the name "Philip" is not a *Hebrew* name. It's *Greek*. Perhaps that's why these Greeks came to Philip. Here was a bit of common ground in a very foreign territory. What did they say when they came to Philip? *Κυριε, τηλομεν τον Ιασουν ιδειν*. [Transliteration: kurie tyelomen ton lasoun idoun] Did you catch that this time? No? It's in *Greek*, which was the language they understood, even if we don't. In words we can grasp, they asked Philip, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*"

John's gospel doesn't recall the actual meeting of Jesus with these foreigners who came to see him. But when our Lord spoke of drawing all people to himself in the crisis of the cross, you better believe that that included those Greeks, just like it includes everyone today. That much we understand, even as we struggle to make sense out of his crucifixion. And I haven't even begun talking about that other part of the story which can just be as confusing - you know, the resurrection. For many people, perhaps some of us here, these words might as well be in *Greek* for all we comprehend of them. It's easier to envision a bunny hopping around planting Easter eggs than it is to picture what an empty tomb is all about.

Don't you think, though, that when people are seeking Jesus (of course, they may not realize that is what they - in some time of crisis - are after), we are called to be like Philip to them? A funny thing you may have noticed from the story is that when those Greeks came to Philip, he didn't sit them down and fill them in on all the details they may not have understood. No, when they said to Philip, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus,*" he went to Jesus himself, along with his fellow disciple Andrew. Perhaps it was all *Greek* to Philip what God might be doing by bringing these strangers to the party. God has a habit of doing that, you know.

Perhaps, this morning, you are like these people who came to see Jesus. A lot of this "religion" stuff may not make a great deal of sense. You may struggle to understand all the big words, like crucifixion and resurrection and ascension and the rest, and what it all might have to do with you. Well, be assured that we don't have all the answers, ourselves. A lot of it is *Greek* to us, too. But we know the One who has drawn us all to himself, and that's enough. We believe that God has a peculiar habit of bringing strangers to the party, and if that is you just now, let's go to him together.....

Acknowledgement: Estella B. Horning