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Lent 5  
John 12:20-33  
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To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father -- to him be glory and power for ever and ever. (Rev 1:5-7)

### **John 12:20-33**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Do you know anyone who just has a magnetic personality? You know what I mean, a person everyone just normally flocks to, someone everyone wants to be around. Some people just exude a palpable sense of self-confidence which attracts others to them. There was a guy like that who was a year older than me in school. He was someone you just wanted to hang out with. He was someone you wanted to be like.

Jesus, on the other hand, wasn't like that at all. In fact, Isaiah describes Jesus in this way, **"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not"** (Isaiah 53:2b,3). Now, yes, it's true, Jesus did often have large crowds gathering around him. But he was such a disappointment to them! He didn't do what they wanted him to do, he didn't say what they wanted him to say. They'd come, sure, but when they found out what Jesus was really about, they'd leave just as quickly.

Once, when teaching about how he would die, about the necessity of his death, the crowds were scandalized. That's not what they wanted to hear. He had just fed over 5,000 of them with a few scraps of food. That's what they wanted! But that wasn't why Jesus had come and he had to remind them *"My time has not yet come!"* So, at that time John wrote, **"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him"** (John 6:66). Jesus was a disappointment to many.

It's a bit odd, then, to hear Jesus say this morning, **"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."** The way he was going to draw people to himself was by being crucified?! The people you know with magnetic personalities, it's not because they are meek and mild, definitely not because they suffer and die, right? But that's how Jesus said he would draw people to himself, by being crucified. Think of that scene. It's disturbing. It's horrendous. The scene of Jesus' crucifixion is not one that is comfortable, but through his death, through that crucifixion, Jesus draws all people to himself.

It was the last week of Jesus' ministry – the last week of Jesus' life – when the events of this text take place. Just a couple days earlier Jesus had humbly, yet triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem on the back of the foal of a donkey. For a few weeks Jesus had been making a long, winding, final journey to the city for one last celebration of the Passover.

Up until that time, especially since his public ministry had begun three years earlier, Jesus had to remind those around him, *"My time has not yet come"*. The timing for his rescue of the world wasn't quite right yet, but when a small group of Greeks asked Philip about the possibility of seeing Jesus, it was time. **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."**

At first glance, Jesus' words seem rather strange. In fact, this entire discourse seems a bit puzzling, doesn't it? If there ever was, humanly speaking, a time for Jesus to be glorified it was when he rode into Jerusalem! He should have taken advantage of that swell of public recognition and honor and ridden that donkey all the way to the Temple or the palace in Jerusalem to take up his rightful place! But now Jesus says it is time for him to be glorified, and the rest of the time he's talking about his death. You don't normally think of death when you hear the word "glory", do you? But Jesus was looking forward to his death.

That doesn't mean Jesus was looking forward to his suffering. In fact, he said, **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."** Jesus knew what lay ahead of him in just a couple days – betrayal, injustice, violent ridicule, beatings, floggings, lack of sleep, crucifixion, and death. Jesus knew it was coming and while he wasn't looking forward to that, he was looking forward to the final outcome of his suffering and death – the final outcome of his being **"lifted up from the earth"**.

It is pretty weird, if you really stop and think about it, that we follow one who died such a violent and pitiful death, isn't it? When Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman Empire, the Romans just couldn't understand that. They couldn't understand why these people would follow a man who had been crucified! There was nothing more lowly than crucifixion. And yet, Jesus just wouldn't go away. People kept being drawn to him, just like he said they would.

So what was it that drew so many to Christ? What is it that has drawn you to him? It's his love. To really understand the magnetism of Christ, we need to understand ourselves. We need to understand how repulsive our sin is to God. We need to understand our shameful rebellion against God.

Your sin is not some minor character flaw. Your sin is not just making bad decisions or slipping up from time to time. Your sin is open and willful rebellion against God. This is how God, through Isaiah, describes your sin, **"For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived"** (Isaiah 59:12,13).

Not a pretty picture. That's not someone I'd want to love, that's not someone I'd want to save. But that's you! And that's me! That's what you and I are by nature – full of sin, full of offenses against God, full of rebellion and treachery.

But then, in the First Lesson today, God says, **"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"** (Jeremiah 31:34). It is at the cross of Jesus that those two are reconciled. It's at the cross of Jesus that God's righteous wrath and anger against sin and his deep and burning love for all sinners is reconciled. Your sin and your rebellion brings God's wrath and judgment upon you, but through the cross of Christ, you have forgiveness. Through the cross of Christ your offenses and sin and rebellion and treachery has all been taken away.

And that's what Jesus was looking forward to! He was not looking forward to the depths of shame and scorn, to the pain and anguish of the cross, but he was looking forward to what his cross, what his death, would do for you! Jesus knew he had to be the seed that dies. He said, in another seemingly cryptic statement, **"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains**

**only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”** Jesus was about to die so that through his death your forgiveness would be secured. Through his death, and through the forgiveness he won in his death, you are now one of those many seeds that follows. You follow Jesus now and to eternity in heaven.

It is that good news of forgiveness that draws you to Jesus. Through that good news of Jesus’ self-sacrificing love for you, faith has been planted in your heart. Through that good news the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart to bring you to faith. He has brought you to trust that Jesus is your Savior, that through Jesus’ cross you have been forgiven.

Jesus’ love which is most clearly seen at the cross draws you to him because only with Jesus do you have forgiveness and a place with God in heaven. Jesus has drawn you to himself, just like his love drew in that group of Greeks – **“we would like to see Jesus.”**

This one little sentence by these Greeks shows the glory of Jesus’ love. His love works in our hearts and lives to bring us to want to see him. We want to know more about this one who loved us so much that he died for us, and who still loves us so much that through his Word and promise of forgiveness he draws us in to receive his forgiving love.

Jesus’ magnetic love for you gives you the same attitude as those Greeks. His magnetic love pulls you close to him to keep receiving his love. Jesus may not have had a magnetic personality that drew people in and kept them close to him. But he had and still has a magnetic love for you, a love that led him to the cross so he can draw you to himself to give you forgiveness.

Amen

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father -- to him be glory and power for ever and ever. (Rev 1:5-7)

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