

Lent 5

John 12:20-33

March 17, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Our Savior's Finest Hour

The hour has come  
God's name is glorified

We continue to hear about the war between Russia and Ukraine as well as the war between Israel and Hamas. We are most fortunate that war has not been waged on our soil for over 150 years. Whenever a country is being attacked, all of its citizens suffer. That was certainly the case in England in 1940 before the United States joined, what would become, World War II. The Nazis controlled all of Europe and England stood alone against them. Everyone struggled with food shortages and fear as the Nazis kept bombing England. But the English stood firm. Their Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, concluded one speech by saying, "This was their finest hour." It was even more serious as Jesus went to war with the devil. It is a conflict which effects all of our lives and we rejoice to see our Savior's finest hour.

On the Tuesday before he died, Jesus was in Jerusalem. There were some Greeks there, non-Jews who learned about the promised Savior they needed. The Holy Spirit worked faith in their hearts. They heard about Jesus and wanted to see him. Could he be the promised Savior? They approached Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, and asked to meet with Jesus. Jesus used their request as an opportunity to explain to everyone that the hour has come. The Apostle John made a big point of "Jesus' hour." It was not "his hour" when he was at a wedding in Cana (John 2). It was not "his hour" when he was talking to the woman at the well (John 4). It was not "his hour" when the Jews were ready to kill him (John 7 & 8). But now, finally, it was "his hour." Like football players before the Super Bowl, Jesus was ready for the final contest with Satan. It was time to save the world. He powerfully proclaimed (:23), "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!**"

Certainly, he was fired up as he continued, (:27) "**Now my heart is troubled** [stirred up, agitated], **and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.**" Jesus' goal on this earth was not just to live a perfect life. He also came to die an innocent death. Jesus was not playing for a basketball trophy or even fighting to save a nation. The destiny of the entire human race hung in the balance. All of human history was pointing to this moment, this hour. And all of human history would be affected by this moment, this hour. It's like some heavenly alarm clock rang. It was going to be tough, but he was ready.

Jesus would save the world, of course, by giving up his life. He explained (:24), "**Very truly I tell you** [Jesus could not be more emphatic. This is important!], **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.**" If you take a seed and frame it to hang on display, it might look interesting, but I doubt if anyone would say that it looks glorious. The purpose of a seed is not to be looked at, but to be planted. And when you plant a seed, amazing things happen. A plant grows and you enjoy a crop. When a seed is planted, or buried, it "dies." But from its death comes life. In the same way, when Jesus died and was buried, life sprang forth, life for all people. Jesus' hour for saving the world had come. He continued (:31), "**Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world [the devil] will be driven out.**" Thousands of years earlier, in the Garden of Eden, God promised to send a Savior who would crush the devil's power and now it was going to happen. Now, all those who opposed him, especially the devil, would be judged as wrong.

Our entire faith life, the forgiveness of sins, heaven's happiness and every promise in the Scripture depends on what Jesus did during that last week in Jerusalem. For the good of your soul and the glory of Christ, please come to our special services over the next few weeks. There is still one more Wednesday night service this week. Next Sunday we will celebrate how Jesus rode into Jerusalem as our saving King. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services get us even more spiritually focused for Easter morning. It's also a great opportunity to invite someone to join you. Just as Philip introduced those Greeks to Jesus some 2000 years ago, you can introduce someone else to Jesus now. Invite a friend or relative to come to church with you and rejoice in our Savior's finest hour.

I think this story in John 12 is one of the neatest stories in Jesus' ministry even though it is not that well known. Jesus was in front of a large group of people talking about his death he was going to undergo when he prayed out loud (:28), "**Father, glorify your name!**" Then, St. John tells us (:28), "**A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'**" Everyone around Jesus wondered what happened. How would you react if you heard God speaking from the sky? Wow! Some excused it as weird thunder. Others thought an angel spoke. Really, it was God the Father. The Father spoke from the sky at Jesus' baptism, at his transfiguration, and here just before his death. Each time, God the Father was letting people know that Jesus was the God-approved Savior of the world. Through his life, and now in his death, Jesus glorified God's name. His hour had come.

I was once at a church volleyball tournament for adults where one man was playing especially well. He always seemed to be in the right place and the

other teams could barely return his serves. He led his team to a trophy. Whenever he made a great play, his elderly father in the stands would ask, “What’s that guy’s name?” People sitting nearby knew that the player was his son and had fun saying the man’s name again and again. Then the father would say, “Oh, yeah. That’s right.” And everyone would laugh. His son was working and sweating on the volleyball court, but the father got a lot of attention and compliments. Because of what Jesus did, God the Father’s name is glorified. Through Jesus we see just how much God loves us – all glory to his name. It is just amazing that God would punish and kill his innocent son because of what we did wrong just because he wanted us in heaven. Would you sacrifice your son or daughter for someone who did not deserve it?

God’s name was also glorified in the way that those Greeks (non-Jews) were coming to Jesus. Jesus explained (:32), **“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.”** Jesus was not just the Savior of the Jews. He was also the Savior for those Greeks, for everyone from every nation. And if he is the Savior for everyone, then he is your Savior too. Jesus even knew the details of how he was going to die – through a shameful and painful crucifixion. He knew what was coming, but he did not run away. He was ready.

The fact that Jesus saved you from eternal death brings glory to God’s name. We usually think of a glorious life as when people enjoy every luxury because they are rich and famous. Jesus really flips the whole concept of glory upside down. Jesus said that his true glory would be seen as he hung on a cross with his weight pulling down on the spikes through his flesh pulling his bones out of joint, as his blood drained out of him, as his only possession (a robe) was taken from him, as he gasped for each breath, as the leaders of society laughed at his pitiful condition. But through that misery, we see how very much God loves us. We see how much God was willing to endure so that our sins could be paid for and we could be with him forever in heaven. What love! What devotion! What commitment! What glory we see in Jesus!

God’s name is also glorified in your death, but I am not talking about when your heart stops beating and your lungs stop breathing. Jesus put it this way (:25,26), **“Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”** When we believe in Jesus as our Savior and do what he wants us to, when we serve him, we are really “killing” our self, our sinful nature. That is not easy. Some of us are prone to stressing out about things that we can not control. If we are going to follow Jesus, we need to hand our worries to him and trust that he can take care of things.

Some are prone to abusing alcohol or drugs. It is not easy to say “no” to something when your body is craving it. Others struggle with sexual issues. It is not easy to resist an urge or inclination in your body. Some are so focused on finances that it becomes difficult to keep Jesus as first place in your heart. What is your weakness that the devil is trying to exploit – Laziness? Greed? Gluttony? Temper? Dirty mouth? We all have an ego, which can be a big stumbling block for us. When we “lose our sinful life” and live the way God wants us to, we are bringing glory to God’s name.

Resisting temptations brings glory to God because only by the strength he gives us through his Spirit can we strive to live like the children of God we are, let alone do any good works. That is what we pray for when we pray, **“Hallowed be your name.”** We are asking God for the strength to live a life that would bring glory to God’s name. We do not want to sin. We want to do the right thing. We will constantly be asking ourselves, “How can I glorify God best now?” Sometimes that’s coming to church singing. Other times, it’s helping a friend. Still other times, it’s taking care of your body. Or, listening to a friend vent out his feelings. Or, reading your Bible and on and on. We will use the commandments as our guidelines. We will be serving instead of selfish. We will be helpful instead of hurtful. We will glorify God’s name by the way we live our lives.

When Winston Churchill was asked what his aim was in the war against the Nazis, he powerfully proclaimed, **“What is our aim? I can answer with one word: Victory.”** Through Jesus Christ you already have the victory over sin, death and the devil. It was difficult. It cost Jesus his life. He suffered the reality of hell as he was lifted up on the cross for all the world to see. But because of what he did, you are safe. You have the victory. When the Royal Air Force kept England safe from a Nazi invasion, Winston Churchill said, **“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”** We can say the same thing about Jesus, our Savior. Never in the history of the world was so much owed by so many to one person, Jesus. His suffering and death was, indeed, his finest hour. And that makes him your Savior. Amen.