

“Following to Friday”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Second in a Lent series on John 12

John 12:20-26

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Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

You might remember when Jesus went to a wedding feast. They ran out of wine. What a great opportunity that was to show everyone what he can do! But Jesus said, “No. My time has not arrived yet.” (O, he did rescue the wedding, and turned water into wine. But he did it quietly; hardly anyone knew.)¹ It wasn’t time.

Much later, when his reputation was really growing, the authorities tried to arrest Jesus. But they failed. His time had not arrived yet. So Jesus kept on teaching, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, and provoking his opponents.² They could do nothing about him. It wasn’t time.

Jesus spoke of the time. It would be his time, his greatest hour. It was always ahead, always coming, but not arrived. Not yet.³

Until now.

II

“Sir, we want to see Jesus.”

Their accent is Greek. (Back then, people in many countries spoke Greek.) They are visiting for the Passover festival. Maybe they are Jews. Maybe they are drawn to Judaism. Whatever, they are curious about Jesus.

No wonder! The whole city is wild over him. I’m saving for later (Palm Sunday) the story when he swept in, the crowds waving and proclaiming him their new king and Messiah. This happens just after that. These visitors have seen this great demonstration of Jesus’ popularity, and the hopes so many have in him. They’ve also, no doubt, heard of his power. The word is that he raises the dead!

“We want to see Jesus!”

Did they get their moment with him? We don’t know.

We know Jesus’ answer, though. *Follow me. Then you will see. Follow me to Friday.*

¹ John 2:1-11.

² John 7:30 and 8:20.

³ John 4:20-23, 5:25.

III

Okay, Jesus actually says: *“The time has arrived for the Human One to be glorified.”*

The Hebrew phrase *kibar 'anash* can be translated “human one” or “son of man.” It basically means a person, like us. But it became a promise, more than us. People spoke of “the Human One” whom God will raise up and give power to. He will rule forever and ever over all the earth.⁴

People are seeing Jesus, and that is what they’re thinking about. They are waiting for Jesus to show his glory.

What do they expect to see? What do you expect? God’s reign of peace and justice, where everyone will flourish? The hateful crushed, terrorists stuck down, and fear-mongers tamed? People will worship in peace, and love without worry. Or, you might put it some other way that fits with Jesus.

The time has arrived! Everyone — the crowd and his critics, his friends and followers, the “Greeks” and the whole world, and us — it’s finally time to see who Jesus really is and what he is going to do. His glory!

But what he is saying sounds like, *“Follow me to Friday.”*

IV

Because now he is talking about a grain of wheat falling to the ground.

He is talking about his death. He has already been hinting at it. That’s confused everyone. *He’s supposed to be the Messiah. Messiahs don’t die, not like this. The Messiah defeats his enemies. Jesus talks about being the Human One, with God’s power and authority. No way does the Human One get hung from a cross.*

But Jesus says this is exactly what needs to happen. He will be crucified. His enemies will claim victory. They’ll denounce him a failure, a fake, a fraud. His friends and followers will weep, crushed, lost.

Jesus says all this is precisely because he is the Human One, the Messiah (the Christ), our Saviour. It has to happen.

“A grain of wheat.” It has to be sown, laid in the ground, buried, like dead. Only then, from the cold of the soil, from its lifeless demise, does the grain burst forth, spring up and spread out an abundance, bearing fruit tens, hundreds, thousands, millions times over.

⁴ See Daniel 7, especially vv. 13-14.

But it has to be buried first.

Want to see Jesus? *Follow him to Friday.*

∨

Then you will see what your life is all about.

“Those who love their lives will lose them,” Jesus says, *“but those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever.”* That’s hard and heavy. I think Jesus uses over-the-top words to slap us and wake us up.

Jesus loves life. Our lives are God’s gifts! We can’t hate what God gives.

But, we know life is not just a biological heartbeat and a bouncing brain wave. We live our lives. We fill our lives. What do we fill them with? What do we live them for? What are you filling your life with? What are you living your life for?

I know what we get told. Life is about being successful, getting ahead, climbing the ladder, making a profit (or at least a living), keeping healthy, having dignity, honour, and respect, making a good name for ourselves. So we fill up on these things. Or we fill up on worse. We live for these things, but nothing more.

God wants to fill us with more. God made us to live for better. We are crafted for life abundant, overflowing, and never ending.

How do we fill with this God-shaped life? By giving it away! (Strange!) How do we gain it? By giving it up! (Stranger!!)

Except, Jesus is the Human One. He shows us who God truly makes us to be. He shows us what a glorious human life looks like. He has every day. He will on, especially, on Friday when he gives up his life, out of love for all lives; when he surrenders his life, so we can finally live.⁵

Follow him to Friday.

⁵ Bruner writes, “Jesus did not seem to hate his life in this world. I can only interpret Jesus’ intentional hyperbole to mean ‘the person who dies to the supremacy to his or her own self-preservation and advancement at all costs,’ a preservation and advancement that are usually law number one for human beings. I think we could translate Jesus in this way: ‘If one hates the way life is lived in this world’ in his consummately selfish way and in our own culpable involvement in that way, ‘then one will, by living counter-culturally, preserve one’s life into a deep, lasting Life.’” Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 714.

VI

“Whoever serves me must follow me,” Jesus says. *“Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honour whoever serves me.”*

Jesus taught us a lot about this life God has for us, and about what living it is like. But he did not give a “how-to” manual, something we go off and figure out ourselves. It’s not a life that’s taught. It’s given. We can only live this life by following the only One who is this life.

Following him to Friday.

We’re finishing the second week of Lent, and of course I’m talking about Good Friday. But following Jesus to Friday is not just about these next weeks ahead. It’s the whole pattern of life that Jesus gives us to live, when he says to each of us, “Follow me.”

Jesus call is free. The only thing that qualifies you to follow is that it is Jesus who calls you. That’s enough.⁶

Following Jesus is the greatest gift, and it is costly.

Following Jesus is costly, because it is about obeying him in all things. He is not a domineering enslaver. But he is demanding. When you follow him, you don’t get to follow others, including yourself. It is the greatest gift, because you are following the One who loves you so much he gave his life for you, willingly.

Following Jesus is costly, because what you value will change. Things you felt so important, you will see differently. It is the greatest gift, because what he gives you is of unimaginable value.

Following Jesus is costly, because the mockery, jeering and hatred cast at Jesus will land on you. It is the greatest gift, because his is the highest honour and greatest love.

It’s costly, because it is following to Friday.

It is the greatest gift, because you go with Jesus.

⁶ Anyone who has read Dietrich Bonhoeffer will recognize my inspiration for this last section. See Discipleship Trans. Martin Kuske and Ilse Todt (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 43-91.