



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Tuesday in Holy Week

#### Breaking Barriers

**[RCL] Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36**

Conflict, confrontation, and choices amid feelings, hopes, and fears. What's happening on this Tuesday of Holy Week? What have we seen and what will we witness on this part of our journey? How does it speak to us today? We are called to remember that we have seen some amazing things in our walk. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Sunday was colorful and moving, with Jesus riding the donkey and the multitude laying palms in his path and crying out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" A powerful scene to witness. Yesterday, we witnessed Mary taking a pound of perfume and anointing Jesus' feet during a dinner at the home of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Our mind's eye is full of scenes with great meaning and significance.

Today's Gospel is equally compelling. Marilyn Salmon observes that our Gospel invites us to recognize the power of the ability to see that which is not accessible by ordinary sight. The Rev. Canon Ed Rodman often advised the Church and its people to view the world through Gospel eyes. And, when we do – we witness those things which the eye has not seen, ears have not heard, and that which has yet to enter our hearts.

Today, we see an opportunity to move beyond ethnocentrism, a choice we can make this Holy Tuesday that is beyond many of our ordinary visions. Yet, it is a foundational message that speaks through our Gospel. Perhaps this is what the Greeks are doing in the Gospel. They are viewing the world with Gospel eyes and seeking to witness the Good News embodied by Jesus. They wish to see the truth and light that is Jesus. Perhaps they recognize the coming revelation of Jesus as Christ. When we look and listen closely, we find that the Greeks were among those at the festival, and they intentionally seek out someone to help them see Jesus. They approach Philip and tell him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Jesus is interested in meeting them. He does not resist. The interest of the Greeks in seeing Jesus and Jesus' openness to their inquiry are significant in the context of Jesus' world; his public ministry takes place at a time when ethnocentrism is normal and thickly complex.

Jesus' public ministry pushes against the hierarchy of human value that claims some of us are better than others, some less human than others, some more deserving of God's favor and grace than others. Jesus

went beyond the bias of his cultural context and the religious practices of the Jewish people and authorities. We see this in his Parable of the Good Samaritan in which the Samaritan – the *Other* – demonstrates the power of love to the man who fell victim to robbers. We see it in Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well. He teaches and demonstrates there are no throwaway people.

It’s against this background that we are invited to view his openness to Philip’s inquiry on behalf of the Greeks who wish to see him. He does not ask why they want to see him. He immediately proclaims the desire of the Greeks to see him as the embodiment of the goal of his walk on earth. Scholars note that Jesus’ response to Philip is a proclamation of his salvific mission to all on earth. His openness to their inquiry and his response reinforce his choice to confront the status quo of ethnocentrism. He chooses to teach and embody love for neighbor beyond one’s tribe. The religious authorities see the same and are threatened by its significance; in the verse before our Gospel reading, some religious authorities are impacted by the broadening impact of Jesus’ signs and the multitude’s embrace of him. They react to the response of the crowd, saying, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!” We begin to recognize the power of the observations Michael Marsh makes about Holy Week as a time of conflict, confrontation, and choices. Conflict, confrontation, and choices amid feelings, hopes, and fears.

Perhaps the Greeks are a sign that Jesus’ message and his significance as the Son of Man is coming and is meant to be the salvation for all people in the world. The presence of the Greeks and their desire to see Jesus in a context and world that is thick with ethnocentrism is Good News that we should embrace in our times: It speaks across time and the particularities of any context. Let’s look closely at the substance of Jesus’ response to Philip:

*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”*

Religious scholar Dr. Dominic Obielosi posits that the Greeks’ visit is a confirmation of the message that salvation is for all who believe and not just for the Jews of the region initially following Jesus. This message is foundational in our times today; it signals that we, too, must understand that God’s salvific mission is not only for us in our parishes, in our tradition, but for the world. It forces us to acknowledge that the first people to seek out Jesus after his triumphal entry to Jerusalem were the Greeks.

All of this reinforces the observation that the Greeks did not come to see Jesus the teacher, or the miracle worker, but the Jesus who must die first to bear the fruit of gathering all properly to himself. It is against this background that we are invited to recognize that Philip’s response to the Greeks signals the position of the church in its mission of reconciling people of all backgrounds to God. In this period when so much of the public life is shaped by leveraging ethnocentric signals to reinforce power, status, and private privilege, our Holy Tuesday calls us to embrace a transforming Christology.

Conflict, confrontation, and choices amid feelings, hopes, and fears. In the time of Jesus' Passion during Holy Week, this Holy Tuesday we see Jesus choose to embrace his public ministry of breaking down divisions between peoples and proclaiming the equality of all people. Let us embrace a Christology that is transformative, moving beyond the prejudices of our day. May we order our steps during this Holy Week; may we show people Jesus and may we better understand his salvific mission to redeem the world and reconcile us to God and one another. Amen.

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