

Drawn to Jesus

a sermon

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John 12:20–33

The Bible passage I read starts as some people from Greece show up. These Greeks, they wanted to see Jesus. That's what they told Philip, one of the disciples, that they wanted to see Jesus.

Now I wonder if Philip wasn't very bright. Because you'd think that when the Greeks told him, "We wish to see Jesus," he'd, you know, *take them to see Jesus*

But for some reason he seemed stumped. It was as if he didn't know what to do. It was like he just stood there, going "I don't what to do."

Now maybe he didn't know what to do because Philip and the rest of the disciples hadn't ever had that happen before. This was the first time people from another country told the disciples that they wanted to see Jesus. It had always been people from Philip's own country who came to see Jesus, and it was always such people that Jesus went to see.

But now there were these Greeks who had come to Jerusalem, and they wanted to see Jesus. What was Philip supposed to say to them?

Again, I don't think Philip was very bright.

So Philip goes to Andrew to ask for advice. Andrew seems to be a little brighter. Good for him! They decide that they'd better take it directly to Jesus. Finally!!! And that's what they do. They go to Jesus, with their new friends from Greece.

When they get to Jesus, this is what he says: "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."

"The hour has come." That's right. Things are now ready for Jesus "to be glorified." Now that the message is starting to reach and touch those beyond Israel, he can be glorified. Now that the universal importance and impact of Jesus are starting to become known, he can be glorified.

But what does that mean? What does it mean for Jesus to be glorified?

Well, in the Gospel of John, it means his death on the cross.

Now, I get it. One might think that his glorification would be his rising from the dead, his resurrection. I get it. But that is not what he means here, and it's not what he says here. Jesus says "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." It doesn't mean his resurrection. Instead, the lifting up from the earth is his being hoisted up onto a cross to suffer and die.

But don't go by me. Listen to those words that come immediately afterward: "He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die." And it is his death, on the cross, that will draw all people to him.

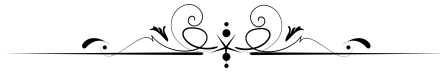
I ask you: What is

the culmination of Christ's ministry,
the pinnacle of history,
the object of human longing,
the essential expression of his nature,
the truest demonstration of his power and love?

It is his death on a cross.

The cross of Jesus is the defining symbol of who Jesus is and what he means:

he is the Son of Man who suffers and dies,
and in doing so,
on the cross,
he is seen clearly by many
to be who he truly also is,
the risen and ascended Son of God.



And here's where it gets tough. Or weird. Or deep. Depending, maybe, on your point of view. Because it is from the cross that Jesus will draw all people to himself. But what does that mean?

Well there's something important going on here, and it is somewhat the opposite of what many Christians expect. Because this whole notion of Jesus *drawing us to himself* is not really that familiar for many Christians. Actually, I think that to very many it is unfamiliar, even strange. And that, as I see it, is a problem.

How often have you heard talk about welcoming Jesus into our hearts? Or of asking Jesus to come near to us? Or of making room in our lives for him? Sound familiar? Of course it does. It all sounds familiar. And many of us have said these things ourselves. Some of us even believe in them very deeply.

But this passage from the Gospel of John should have us question these phrases. For they go in a very different direction from the truth as expressed in Scripture:

Jesus welcomes us.
Jesus makes room for us.
Jesus draws us to him.

I don't know how many of you have noticed it, or given it much thought. The stained glass window here to my right is of a hand with a heart in it. It's meant to recall the personal seal of John Calvin, the great 16th century reformer and theologian. The words on his seal are these: "My Heart I Offer to You, Lord, Promptly and Sincerely."

I love that. Because, really, truly, when it comes down to it, we don't ask Jesus to come into our hearts; instead, we must offer our hearts to Jesus, *because they really belong to him*.

It's not that Jesus comes into *our* lives. Rather, Jesus brings us into *his* life.

Becoming a Christian does not mean that Jesus takes up residence *where you already live*. It means *you* living with *Jesus*, where *he* lives.

It's not that he moves in with us where we already are, but instead that he calls us to him,

so we leave behind our own dwellings,
so that we may dwell where *he* is.

And where is Jesus? Where, according to these verses from the Gospel of John, is Jesus most truly seen and known? From what spot does Jesus draw us to him?

It is the cross. His place of death.

Well, that's a troublesome place, the cross. Can't we avoid it? Can't it be simply what Jesus did for us long ago, and leave it at that?

But Jesus won't let it go.

Not for himself.

Not for us.

"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also."

Those who would serve him must follow him to *that* place: to the cross, to where he suffers and dies.

But we resist the cross. And we resist it because we crave comfort, so much so that anything threatening the comfortable is viewed as a mortal enemy. We want to draw Christ to where we are,

into our lives,
into our hearts,
into our homes,
into our familiar and comfortable places;

yet he draws us to himself,

away from home,
away from familiarity,
away from comfort.

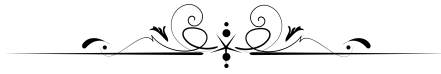
Jesus calls us to himself and draws us to himself. He has us join ourselves and conform ourselves to him. He calls us to offer him our hearts, promptly and sincerely. He asks us

to walk where he walks,
to go where he goes,
to give as he gives,
to be near to kind and cruel,
to accompany those who bless and those who curse.

For that's where he goes, and he goes ahead of us, to places of suffering where he can suffer alongside others and even bear their suffering.

He walks in the prisons.
He walks in the bars.
He walks in homeless shelters.
He walks in courts of law.
He walks in hospital rooms.
He walks in nursing homes.
He walks with the prostitutes and the drug addicts.

He walks with them. And we walk with him. He says to them, he says to us, “follow me.” This is where he calls us to follow him, and this is not only what he calls us to do but also what he enables us to do. Because he draws us to himself. And his calling and drawing are his gift to join him in his walk. It is his *promise* to us: “where I am, there *will* my servant be also.”



So let us grasp on to that promise, and, drawn to him, follow Jesus wherever he walks.
Let's join him with the broken, the needy, the wanting, the poor.
Let's join him with the abused and the forgotten, the powerless and the forsaken.
Let's follow him as he walks right into the midst of suffering and conflict.
Let's accept

his call,
his challenge,
his invitation,
his promise,

as we, by his love and by his power, are more and more drawn to him.