

Title: **Drawn By the Cross**

Subtitle: The lifted cross brings us to a place of decision

Our Gospel today takes place at the beginning of the most momentous last week of our Lord's life. Our narrative picks up right after the Triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, when "some Greeks who went up to the temple to worship"¹ come to Philip and ask to see Jesus. They are curious because Jesus performed many miracles and recently raised a person named Lazarus from the dead. To add to their amazement, Lazarus was present at the feast and gave living proof of the things they had heard. As God-fearing proselytes, they wanted to know more but didn't want to presume to contact Jesus directly. Instead, they came to Philip, probably because he had a Greek name and grew up in a predominantly Gentile region.

As a side note, due to it being Saint Patrick's Day, Philip's name meant "lover of horses." My ancestors were horse lovers from Tipperary, Ireland. They came to America in the 1850s to care for the horses of wealthy landowners in Middleburg and Upperville, Virginia. They were known for having "horse sense," which later served them well due to their common sense in their business dealings.

Philip also had a similar innate ability, which was evident by his choice of Andrew, who he asked to assist him in bringing the Greeks to Jesus. In the Gospels, Andrew is always seen helping people to meet Jesus. The first was his brother, Simon Peter. Later, he introduced the boy with five loaves and two fish, which resulted in the feeding of the five thousand.

When the Greeks come, wanting to see Jesus, Jesus at once recognizes it as a crucial moment that brings him face-to-face

¹ John 12:20

with what must precede his glory. So, he immediately exclaims, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”²

This event is significant for Jesus and the disciples, who will be asked to help people see Jesus. In another sense, the statement was meant to teach the wondering Greeks the true nature of the Messiah. If they thought to see a King like the kings of the Gentile world, they would be greatly disillusioned. Our Lord would have them know that He came to carry a cross and not wear a crown. He came not to live a life of honor, ease, and magnificence but to die for the world’s sins. The kingdom he came to set up would begin with a crucifixion and not a coronation.

But his saying was also meant to teach a more comprehensive lesson, not only about his atoning death but also about what it would mean for those who would follow him. “For whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”³ As Jesus declares these puzzling words, it may appear to some that he is only putting these Greeks off by stating something that seemed cryptic. But in reality, Jesus knows that most of them will come to “see” Him through the faithful witness and ministry of his obedient disciples who have surrendered their lives to serve him wherever he is.

Things are no different today. If people want to see Jesus, they must see him in those who have chosen to follow him. I experienced something of this when I served as a hospice chaplain to a patient who had Alzheimer’s disease. The patient’s two sons warned ahead of time that my visits would be a waste of time. So, I asked them to give me a chance. But first, I asked

² John 12:23-24

³ John 12:25

them to share their most memorable story about their mother. So they told me about the time when their mother was going through a divorce with their dad. While doing the dishes one night, she broke down and cried. In frustration, she took the dish in her hand and threw it on the floor, breaking it into a thousand pieces. As kids, they were at first shocked. Then, to their astonishment, their mother broke another dish. Then, she handed a dish to each of her children, who were just 5 and 7 years old and told them to go ahead and smash them against the floor. After the children joined in, they all began to laugh hysterically. Afterward, they looked back on the experience as something that bonded them together amid her deep pain.

That story may seem like it has no place in my sermon today, except for this. We are all bonded together with Christ when we behold the pain he endured for us. But we are even more deeply bonded with him when we join him in his pain.

By the way, when I retold that same story to the patient while her two sons were present, and in doing so, her eyes lit up, and a smile came across her face, which her sons had not seen for a long while. After seeing the positive result of my visit, her sons changed their attitudes and asked me to come back as often as my time would allow.

This story is another illustration of the presence of God that follows those who try to honor and respect the dignity of every human being.

Remember Gracie Allen, who played the scatterbrained wife in comedy skits with her cigar-smoking husband, George. In one routine, Gracie called in a repairman to fix her electric clock. The repairman fiddled with it for a while and then told her, “There’s nothing wrong with the clock; you just didn’t have it plugged in.” Gracie then replied, “I don’t want to waste electricity, so I only plug it in when I want to know what time it is.”

That's an apt description of many of us. We save our faith for a rainy day. We go about unplugged and wonder why our lives are so devoid of power. Our Christian faith is not meant to be plugged in just when it is convenient or absolutely necessary. The Christian life must be lived daily, and a cost is involved. Jesus knew that the grain that must fall to the earth and die was himself, but it is also true for us when we decide to follow him. Serving Jesus is for those willing to live according to the obedience-death-life sequence that honors God. And when we make that decision, the world around us will be drawn by what they see.

Therefore, I want to challenge you with the question, “What are you doing in response to Christ’s drawing you?” He died for you on the cross; does that not draw you? He now lives at the Father’s right hand in Heaven and continually intercedes for you; does not that draw you? He has promised that nothing in all of creation will ever be able to separate you from his love; does that not draw you? He loves you with a love that is stronger than death; does not that draw you. And if it draws you, will you follow him, even when it means putting his will above your own? If you do, the world hungry to see Jesus will indeed see Jesus in you. And our Heavenly Father will be glorified in you repeatedly each time you offer yourself to him for that purpose.

Let us pray. Lord, help us to come boldly to your throne of grace, asking again what Solomon once prayed, “Draw us, and we will run after you,”⁴ so that world will see Jesus in those who follow you. *Amen.*

⁴ Song of Solomon 1:4