

## John 12: 20-33 What time is it?

The Gospel of John speaks of Jesus' identity not through teachings and parables or even the fulfillment of prophecy as do the other gospel accounts, but through signs. The first sign as presented by John occurs at the wedding at Cana. Jesus has already begun gathering disciples. Then Jesus attends the wedding with those disciples and his mother. When the wine runs out, Jesus' mother tells him "They have no wine." He responds that it is not his concern for "my hour has not yet come." Yet he proceeds to convert six jugs of water into the best wine that has been available at the wedding feast. In that exchange we get a hint that Jesus has a timetable for what he is to accomplish. John's account wants us to know from its beginning that Jesus is the Word Incarnate; that Jesus is fully aware of what his mission is. And the mission will move to a climax when the time is right. This Gospel is thus very much concerned with the passage of time. Shortly after this wedding, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover for the first of the three times John's account describes. Signs of who Jesus is cluster around the Passover festivals. We have already considered the events that happened on that first Passover visit to Jerusalem. Jesus entered the Temple courtyard. After declaring they had made his Father's place a marketplace, he proceeded to drive out all those things required under the law for atonement. He declared that those things were no longer needed. The mention of the second Passover occurs in John 6: 4. No detailed description of it is given per se but it occurs just before the feeding of the five thousand followed by Jesus walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus tells the disciples and the crowd that he is the bread of life and the way to the Father. There are many who witness these "signs" and tell others about them. Jesus tells his followers he will not be going to the festival this year "for my time has not yet fully come." Again, the sense that there is a specified time span for his mission; and that although that time is closer, it is not yet the right time for it to be completed. But he does go "secretly" to Jerusalem and then is found in the Temple teaching. Many hear him and spread the word of their experiences. The opposition is also growing. Some are sent to arrest him but they do not as they too are impressed by his words. Because the hour is not yet, those in opposition are not successful. The setting of the gospel passage from which today's reading comes is the final Passover of Jesus' earthly life. The recent resurrection of Lazarus has frightened the authorities increasing their determination to eliminate this threat of Jesus and his followers to the status quo. Verse 19: "Look, the whole world has gone after him." And in this passage we have three mentions of the hour for which Jesus came being the present one. Verse 23: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Verse 27: "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say---'Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.'" Jesus knows what time it is. He knows what is coming. This is clear because in this passage we have an "almost parable" which describes the coming sacrifice he will make. It is the closest that John's gospel comes to a teaching parable. Here we have the definition given by Jesus of what his mission involves: his death at the hands of those who oppose him. Verse 24: "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." This is followed by Jesus' affirmation that he will die, be raised from the earth and then will draw all people to him. This is also an affirmation

that even though it seems like the rulers of the world have won, instead they will be judged and driven out. In this passage the commitment to the path toward the cross is clearly defined when he states that he will not ask to be saved from this "hour". Although most surrounding Jesus do not understand the combined reference to death and being glorified, the two are intricately woven together in this passage. The voice from heaven responds to Jesus' statements about the hour which has come for him to be glorified: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." Some in the crowd heard this as thunder, some heard an angel speaking. We like John's first audience do understand the meaning of this passage, or at least we think we do. So as we walk closer to the time of the crucifixion, we already have the resurrection firmly in view. That is our context. We view this passage through all the events of the last some two thousand years. To us this is confirmation of what we already know happened and what it means for us. Is that all there is for us to understand from this passage, a reassurance of the things we affirm about Jesus' life and death? Let's go back a step to the first two verses of this passage and see what message may be there for us this morning. "Now among those who went up to worship at the festival there were some Greeks. They came to Phillip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." There is the possibility that this information is just to confirm that Jesus' ministry has attracted the whole world. There are two points here that I think are important. This is where those two summers spent with the Greek and Hebrew languages become a factor. The first is a clarification of how I have often heard people speak about this passage related to the term Greeks used in it. Some use this as an indication that some who were not Jewish sought to learn about Jesus. However, the word used in the manuscripts is not the one used elsewhere for non-believers or Gentiles. The word translates as someone speaking Greek but does not indicate ethnicity. A Gentile or pagan would have no reason to be among those who were going up to worship at the Passover festival. This connection to those in Jerusalem who were celebrating the Passover indicates they may have come as faithful worshipers of God. So who were these Greeks that approached Phillip? They were probably some individuals from the Diaspora, those Jews living outside the region in places like Egypt and Greece since the time of the exile. They were likely Greek speaking Jews who had heard of Jesus. By the way, the disciple they first approached was Phillip whose name was Greek. So these Greek speaking individuals came expressing a desire to see Jesus. In John's account that was the basis of the invitation Jesus made when calling the first disciples..."Come and see." The thing about the request in this passage is that if all they wanted was to "see" Jesus, as we normally view the word...they would not have needed to have made a request of Phillip. Jesus had entered the city openly. He had been available to the crowds which had followed him since the resurrection of Lazarus. So just making visual contact was not the issue. In fact, they may well have already visually seen Jesus and witnessed or heard from others what Jesus was doing. Although we often use "see" in just this way...to indicate catching sight of something...we also use it in the sense of experiencing, of mentally and spiritually perceiving, of understanding something. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." I think that is a request that is still valid for us. These Greek speaking seekers of Jesus went to Phillip who knew Jesus; who had a relationship with him. They sought not just to see, but to learn to know. We want to see Jesus too. We want to encounter Jesus in today's world. We place symbols of Jesus in many places in an effort to see Jesus. These symbols can remind us of Jesus. We find in Scripture the wisdom of Jesus' teachings. In those teachings we are led to understand ways

to view the world; we are led to people, to actions, to places and things where we can see and encounter Jesus in today's world. Although it is not a scripture passage for today, Matthew 25: 31-46 tells us clearly how we can see Jesus around us. "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'" Next comes the part that applies today. Whenever you do it for the least of these, you do it for him. You and I come to church because we want to see Jesus. We are seeking Jesus, but perhaps the best way for any of us to actually see him is to see him in those around us. We know we do not earn our way into salvation. It is a gift of grace and mercy. But if we want to have a relationship with God, then it seems a good way might be to seek him where we are; to look for and find that image of God in those around us and respond to it as we are told we should. Also in Matthew we are given what has come to be known as the Great Commission: To go and spread the good news of the gospel. The question is, if you don't know, haven't experienced Jesus for yourself, don't have a relationship with him how can you then convince someone else who Jesus is. If you don't actually know and show the love of Jesus to someone else rather than just talking about it, how are they to see Jesus? Thus this passage has a message for us today. We are also on a timetable waiting for that time Jesus says he will return, but we don't know the hour. There are many around us today who also need to see Jesus. They may be hurt or angry and have given up on the church because they do not see Jesus in the lives of those to whom they looked to see Jesus. We need to continue to build our relationship with Jesus as we seek to see him in those around us. We need to build that relationship so that its importance to us can be seen in those we encounter. We need to live our lives so that others may see him in us. For us the time is like that middle visit to Jerusalem. What time is it? The hour is not yet fully here and there is a purpose we have been left to accomplish.