

e

The hour has come is an intriguing phrase. I don't think it refers to just one hour, although Jesus clearly is referring to Good Friday in this moment. The hour has come any number of times. The hour has come when the God of creation acts and when God pronounces all of creation good. The hour has come when God calls upon Moses to bring the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt and lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. The hour has come when God calls upon Jeremiah to proclaim the new covenant between God and the Israelites.

The hour has come when God comes to live among us, when our incarnate Lord Jesus takes on full humanity in order to reveal the character and love of God to humankind. And now, the hour has come for Jesus to sacrifice his own life to the violence of the world, so that the violence of the world can finally be overcome. There will be more hours to come: the empty tomb, the ascension to heaven, the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ. There will be more hours to come because God has a plan for the reconciliation of the world to God, which is the perfection of God's creation intended from the beginning of time.

Each time the hour has come, more is revealed to us about God's love, God's care, God's justice, God's mystery and majesty. For Christians, Jesus is our lens into the very heart of God and God's plan for us.

As Jesus proclaims "the hour has come" he follows with three very quick parables, one-liners, to show just what this hour means. "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. Jesus' death on the cross, and all that God accomplishes because of it, has the power to transform our very lives.

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Here is the choice we are given. Choose Jesus' way of life, God's reign, and gain new life. But choose life in this broken world, and your life will be lost to you.

"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be also." The power Jesus proclaims is found in loving and caring for one another. His is servant leadership, and it is the antithesis of what the world reveals. Jesus chooses the love of God above all else, and the glory of God is known because of his choice. No matter what forces of evil will do to him, and here we are talking about authorities of the Temple and authorities of Rome who condemn him to a violent death, nothing will take from his heart his love for God. Nothing will circumvent his carrying out God's plan for the redemption of the world – even if it means his death.

Let me be clear, I don't believe it was God's desire for Jesus to die. I don't believe it was part of God's plan. It would be hard to worship a God who would demand such a sacrifice. I do believe that Jesus was willing to submit to the world's violence and unjust condemnation, trusting in God's ultimate plan. Jesus' death was because of human choice, and despite it, God chose to

raise Jesus from the dead – and in doing so, defeated evil and death – again revealing the glory of God.

“Now is the judgment of the world,” Jesus declares. Again, judgment can be understood as choice. Jesus has come into the world to lead the world to God’s truth. We can follow Jesus or follow the world. The choice is between this world and the reign of God. It is our choice to make, where we will place our lives.

Jesus will be lifted up on the cross by all those who choose life in this world with its violence, exclusion, poverty, racism, and hate. Jesus will be raised to new life by God, who has created us all for new life marked by God’s unconditional love, justice, freedom, and peace. Like all those who have gone before, we get to choose what kind of life we want to live.

“Father, glorify your name,” Jesus says almost in prayer. “As the crowd stands around Jesus, a voice from heaven is heard to say, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” Because the hour has come before and will come again. God is in control of what God does in response, the choice, the unfolding of events, belongs to humankind, belongs to us.

All Lent we have been confronted with choice. Will we follow Jesus? Will we take up our own cross? Will we live as fully as we are able in God’s kingdom, following the way of Jesus, the way of love? Will we, as our baptismal covenant calls us, seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the lord, and strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being? To say yes to all this, with God’s help, is to say yes to God’s plan for the reconciliation of the world to God, the very salvation of the world.

Now, as we approach Holy Week, it is time. Once again, the hour has come, and we must, each of us individually, and as a community of faith, make our choice.