

## *The hour has come*

The Fifth Sunday in Lent + March 21, 2021

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

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*Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "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. 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. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. - John 12:20-33 ñ*

In 2003, Easter Day was celebrated on April 20<sup>th</sup>. It was the latest date on which Easter has fallen in all my years as a parish priest. But I mostly remember the date because of developments nine months before. Brooke had become pregnant with our third child, Grace. The doctor told us that her due date would be April 18, 2003 – Good Friday.

As you can imagine, I felt some trepidation during those nine months. I already knew that when the hour comes and labor begins, every other priority gives way. I already knew that everything is changed by the miracle of new life and by diaper changes. As Holy Week and Easter approached in 2003, I was wondering how all of this would play out.

Thankfully, Grace came nearly two weeks early, and perfectly healthy. I had preached that year on the Fifth Sunday in Lent, on these same Scriptures we've heard today. Before the end of that day Brooke went into labor, and Grace was born the next day.

In today's gospel passage from John, Jesus announces a due date of sorts, his own time of completion, of personal fruition. *The hour has come*, he says: '*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*' He goes on to explore the meaning and implications of this glorification. For Jesus these teachings are not abstractions; he already knows that his due date will arrive during the Passover, on the day we now call Good Friday.

To better understand this *hour* of which Jesus speaks, we must return to Chapter 2 of this gospel and the wedding in Cana of Galilee. At the peak of the party, Jesus' mother came to him, arms folded, eyebrow raised: "*They have no wine.*" And then there's the unspoken message: *Do something about it!* Jesus tries to wriggle out of it at first, saying, in part, "*My hour has not yet come.*" (John 2:4b) Five chapters later, tensions between Jesus and the religious authorities reach a boiling point, and "*...they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.*" (7:30)

Now, however, the hour *has* come, ‘*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*’ Jesus is saying, *My ministry and witness are approaching full-term. The time is coming for me to be delivered into the hands of sinners. And painful and sorrowful as it will be, I will be fulfilling my Father’s plan – for me and for the salvation of the world.*

Jesus is driven forward to his personal destiny by his conviction about the hour. But his personal destiny, as he explains, is playing out on a vastly larger stage, a stage so large that all of us are on it, playing out our parts: “*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*”

We naturally wonder here about our own hour, and Jesus encourages our wondering when he says. ‘*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.*’

A woman who recognized her own hour is described in one of the books by author Kathleen Norris. The woman was a school bus driver. Her passengers were all disabled children. The hour came on the day that a deranged man forced his way onto the bus and held everyone hostage for a time. Later, the police said that the peaceful resolution of the situation hinged on the bus driver, on her calm and leadership in the time of trial. When asked how she could do what she did, she said, “*I pray a lot.*”

Kathleen Norris points out that the woman did not say, “*I prayed a lot,*” as in, *I prayed fervently during the ordeal.* Rather, the woman said, “*I pray a lot.*” In other words, *I live a life that is devoted to prayer, steeped in prayer, informed by prayer. So when the time of trial came, I recognized that my hour had come. It was my time to manifest that faith that had been coming to full term in me, through prayer.*

Today, we draw closer to the hour of which Jesus speaks, anticipating what he will do for us and for all the world on Good Friday. Today, Jesus also asks us to prepare for and see the hour that nears for us. Maybe our hour has arrived to take seriously and begin some overdue hard work of forgiveness. Maybe it’s our due date to stop talking and start acting about some faithful work of justice and mercy. Maybe some grain of wheat in us is waiting – waiting and needing – to fall into the earth and die. Will we be ready for our hour by way of our prayers? Will we know when our hour comes, whatever it is and whenever, that Jesus has already been there and that he will be with us? *Amen.*