

Palm Sunday B, 2009

Text: John 12:20-43

Title: Fame

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Two years ago they took a survey of young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. The survey asked them identify their primary goals in life. As they looked forward to the future, with their whole lives ahead of them, what did they hope to accomplish?

These young people were given a list of five possible goals and were told to rank them in order of importance.

Of those surveyed, 81% identified “to be rich” as either number one or number two.

51% chose “to be famous” as one of the top two goals.

The other three options were “to help people who need help” which came in at 30%, “to be a leader in the community” at 22% and “to become more spiritual” was dead last at 10%.

So our young people want to be rich and famous. Less than one third of them have a goal of helping other people.

That people want to be rich should not be a big surprise. But consider the desire for fame. When folks in the next age bracket, those between the ages of 26 and 40 were asked to rank their goals, being wealthy also had the top spot. But being famous came last with only 29%.

Our young people want their 15 minutes of fame. They want to be celebrities. They’ve seen the reality shows, they have pages on facebook and myspace. They want to be famous.

Now we can spend plenty of time talking about how terrible our society is and how selfish and self-centered young people are today. We can pat ourselves on the back for having our priorities in order. But we shouldn’t be so quick to rush to judgment.

This attitude is not new. This attitude of self-service and self-promotion goes back for generations.

How many of you can honestly say that you wouldn’t want to be rich? And if not rich, we at least want to have enough money to be comfortable, to retire without having to worry, to be able to travel and spoil the grandkids and enjoy life.

And then there’s the fame. We may not desire to be in the spotlight, to have paparazzi follow us around and have our picture on the covers of all the magazines and tabloids. But how many of us want recognition, want to be remembered, want to make a name for ourselves so that people for generations to come will know our name?

Fame and fortune are as tempting to us as they are to our children and our grandchildren. And this is nothing new.

In fact, it goes back much further. For hundreds and thousands of years people have spent their lives in pursuit of fame and fortune.

Which brings us to Jesus and today's gospel.

Jesus was becoming something of a celebrity. When He raised Lazarus from the dead there in the suburbs of Jerusalem, people really took notice. They were flocking to Him in huge crowds. The Pharisees said, "Look how the whole world has gone after Him." Jesus couldn't have timed it any better. He was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Thousands of pilgrims gathered from all over the world were there to celebrate the Passover.

When Jesus rides into town, the people are looking for Him to be another Savior. "Hosanna!" "Save us!" they cry. This is our new king!

Among the pilgrim there are some Greek folks who want to see Jesus. Jesus is the new celebrity and they wanted to meet Him. Picture a crowd of excited groupies backstage trying to get into the dressing room to meet the band. Picture a group of fans waiting outside the clubhouse, trying to get an autograph. Jesus was famous, and people are attracted to celebrities.

To get to Jesus these folks have to go through the disciples. Phillip has a nice Greek name. He might be able to help. So the Greeks ask Phillip, and then Phillip and Andrew go to see Jesus. "So Jesus, Do you have any time to see your fans? I know you don't normally do this sort of thing, Jesus, but they've come from out of town. They just want a minute with you- take some pictures, sign a few autographs, that sort of thing."

The disciples must be loving this. Jesus is finally getting the attention and fame He deserves. And now they are important people too as part of Jesus' entourage.

For the disciples, this has been a glorious day. The big crowds, the palm branches, the songs and shouts, thousands of people had acknowledged Jesus as the blessed one, the one who came in the name of the Lord, even their new king.

This was glorious. This was the fame that they had been looking for.

At first, it seems like Jesus agrees with the disciples. Jesus says "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Finally. Now it's time for the glory. The front cover of the Jerusalem Times. The visits with all the other heads of state and VIPs. Maybe even His own talk show.

No. Jesus has another picture of glory. For Jesus, it's not about cheering crowds. It's not about authority and power. It's not about Himself.

“Truly I say to you,” says Jesus, “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But when it dies, it produces much fruit.”

For Jesus, glory comes not in remain alone, by elevating yourself above the rest of the crowd, but in being planted in the earth and bearing fruit.

For Jesus, glory comes only through death.

For Jesus, glory does not come in being served, but in serving and giving His life as a ransom for many.

For Jesus, it’s not about His name, but the Father’s name. “Glorify your name,” says the Son to His Father.

For Jesus, it’s being lifted up above the crowds, not in triumph, but in death.

The crowd is clearly confused. How can Jesus be the Messiah if He dies? It wasn’t supposed to work that way. The Messiah was to bring the death of His enemies. The Messiah was supposed to live forever. How can Jesus be the Messiah if He is crucified?

The people refused to believe. John tells us why, “For they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God.”

Those in the crowd craved fame. They wanted the kind of fame that got your name in lights, and on everyone’s lips.

This is the kind of fame we want for ourselves, and even for our church. We desire to be a big church that everyone’s heard of. We want the crowds knocking at our doors and overflowing our church.

Pastors are especially prone to this temptation. We desire fame and glory for ourselves. We want to make a name for ourselves and be known as inspiring preachers full of charisma and charm. We want people to hang on our every word and tell all their friends about what a great pastor they have.

But this is not the glory Jesus speaks of. Glory means service and glory means death. It means giving your life in order to bear much fruit. It means bringing glory to God the Father’s name, and not to your own.

When Jesus talks about His glory, He doesn’t focus on the crowds of Palm Sunday. When Jesus talks about His glory, He doesn’t talk about Easter. When Jesus talks about His glory, He talks about Good Friday. Good Friday is where we see God in all of His glory- as He hangs dead on the cross.

Our glory is the same. Our glory is in service. Our glory is in dying to ourselves. True glory is not in being praised by men, but in being ridiculed. True glory is not in making a name for yourself, but in submitting to the will of your heavenly Father. “For Thine is kingdom and the glory and the power,” we pray, and it is.

We began with the desire to be rich and famous. Jesus was tempted by these things, as are we. Jesus overcame these temptations. Instead of using the Palm Sunday crowd to bring Him fame and fortune, Jesus left the spotlight. Our text says, “When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.”

Jesus is still hidden. He has hidden Himself in word and sacrament. That is where we find the glory of God today. Not in spectacular miracles, but in the ordinary and every day. Jesus hides Himself now in bread and wine. As we come now to meet Him, we join in the song of the Jerusalem pilgrims, “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

The body and blood of Jesus Christ, the seed that fell into the ground and died, will now produce much fruit. The body and blood of Jesus Christ, lifted up from the earth, now draws all men to Himself.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.