

## John 12: 20-33 - Sermon for 8am

As we get closer and closer to Easter we are hearing more and more about Jesus's suffering and death as it approaches in each of our Sunday readings. And it would seem to anyone at the time, as its fairly natural to suppose, that Jesus's death would signal the end, and the complete failure of his mission.

But this reading turns the whole thing on its head in at least four ways. One is that Jesus seemed to know all about it in advance and didn't count it as a failure. In fact, he seemed to think that this suffering and death was the very reason he had come. Rather than mission failure, this was the mission itself.

Secondly, the reading turns the idea of failure on its head because for the first time in John's Gospel, we have Greeks coming looking for Jesus. Through Philip and Andrew we have people from outside God's chosen nation coming to find Jesus. It's almost as if, at the same moment as Jesus is reflecting on what people might see as his mission failing, instead it is just beginning to have a worldwide reach. Jesus notes that through his death he will draw all people to himself.

Thirdly, the reading makes it clear that this isn't a failure in God's eyes, but indeed it is God's intention to glorify his own name through Jesus's sufferings. Somehow, this suffering and death is reframed and re-narrated in such a way that denies the shame and accursedness of the cross but instead brings glory to God.

But finally, the reading turns the idea of failure upside down in Jesus's own agricultural teaching. Jesus says that a seed needs to fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit. This metaphor sums up the rest of the passage pretty well. There's no space left for considering Jesus's death as the end of a good run of teaching and reforming the Jewish faith which petered out with the death of the charismatic leader. Instead, Jesus's death is the very thing which is essential for his mission to come to fruition. There is no hint of failure here. It's not even just martyrdom but instead it is the point of the whole divine project.

Somehow, amazingly, Jesus understood his death to be bringing glory to God and to be drawing all people, from every nation to himself. What looked from the outside like failure became the pivot point in all of history, enabling the entire human race to look to God and worship him.

For us, then, we can be encouraged. All too often, we hear of reports of church decline or the tragic failure of the church to carry out its God-given mission faithfully. We hear talk of the weakness of the Christian argument in a scientific era or its irrelevance in a post-modern age. For the record, I don't have any time for either of these stance – neither are logical, consistent, or reasonable; but even if they were true, we can be encouraged – God does not fail in his mission, even when humanly speaking it looks finished. God uses weakness and suffering to bring about his victory. As a church we can be encouraged that if we faithfully serve God, seeking to glorify his name, we will succeed, even if it looks like we have failed.

But also, finally, we can celebrate and marvel at the victory of God's mission, won through the sufferings of Jesus, that everyone can gain access to God, no matter their gender, country of origin, culture or past. It is because Jesus was that seed which voluntarily dropped to the earth in order to die so that a huge harvest of souls could be won. A one-man teacher would have failed, even if he had a huge and amazing career, but the Son of God, who died for each one of us, accomplished

infinitely more in his taking on weakness with a truncated life. It is as the songs says: deep wounds which mar the chosen one, bring many sons to glory.

Thank God for his amazing wisdom that brings glory from tragedy, rescue from failure and even brings life from death. This is our Easter story and the story of Jesus who we follow. Amen.