



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Lent 5 (B)

#### For Your Sake

[RCL] Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

Some foreigners, outsiders, show up for the festival. They say, “We wish to see Jesus.” Philip runs to Andrew and presumably says something along the lines of, “Hey, there are all these foreigners who want to see Jesus! What should we do?”

Andrew obviously has no answers. Who wants foreigners around at a time like this?! So, they run off to Jesus to tell him the foreigners are at the gates looking for him. Jesus says, in effect, if you want to see me, really, really see me, then stick around. You’ll have to deal with my death at the hands of Rome to really, really see me. Are they ready for that? Are *you* ready for that? To which we might add, are *we* ready for that?

Then obviously there was some noise. Some thought it was thunder, so it must have been loud. Some thought it looked as if Jesus was talking to someone, but there was no one there. Must be angels, some surmise. It was that voice from heaven. The same voice he heard at his baptism that said, “You are my beloved. I am well pleased with you.” The same voice from the cloud on the mountaintop with Peter, James, John, and Jesus that said, “This is my beloved, listen to him.” Are we listening yet?

Now when Jesus says, “Father, glorify thy name,” the voice returns and says, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” Or was it thunder? Is he talking to angels? Has he simply lost it and started talking to himself? Should we even think of letting the foreigners see him like this?

While everyone is trying to figure out what is happening, Jesus announces, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.” Which I would take to mean: for our sake, not his.

This voice that keeps coming around is for us, not for Jesus, which makes perfect sense. He knows the voice. The voice knows him. He has always heard the voice. He comes to get us to listen to the voice.

Surely, we must wonder why we do not hear the voice like Jesus does more often? Or at all! Would it surprise us to learn that to this very day, 90% of the peoples of the world regularly hear such voices? That modern Westerners are the minority, the anomaly, as those people who do not regularly access this kind of communication with God and spirits? The question is quite naturally, why not us? And most people say we

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are too busy to be listening, or think we are too sophisticated to hear voices, or think you have to be crazy or mentally ill to hear such voices. Someone has suggested that maybe it is because we are too grown up. Someone else has pointed out that most other cultures do not make such a big thing out of growing up. And isn't it Jesus, after all, who says we are to come to the kingdom like children?

And couldn't it be that we don't want to hear anything about having to watch him die, watch him be executed, the victim of state-sanctioned capital punishment? Dress it up as being like a grain of wheat, call it what you may, but that is what it is: state-sanctioned public execution. In all the debate on capital punishment, how often are we asked to reflect upon what it might mean that the One who calls us into a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the victim of state-sanctioned capital punishment?

All we know is that he says, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine."

This voice that says, "You are my beloved. I am well pleased with you. I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again." We are left feeling that for God's name to be glorified, we need to be listening to God's voice and learn how to become part of the glorifying process.

Holy Week and all it portends may be dark and scary. But it is not nearly as frightening as the prospect that for others to see Jesus, we might need to be part of the glorifying process. In Sunday School, we rarely hear anything about this voice and its being for us. Seminaries typically do not offer a lot of training on how to listen for this voice Jesus says is for us.

The creeds do not appear to discuss it. The catechism does not seem to discuss it. Yet, there it is. "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine." Seems as if we'd best get listening to hear what this voice says; nothing less than the future of the whole world is at stake, he goes on to say.

The problem is that those of us who, like the foreigners, want to see Jesus are the very people to whom others come expecting to see Jesus. In us. In what we say and what we do. In his book *By Grace Transformed*, the late Gordon Cosby of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., discusses just how it is that others "hear the voice" and come to see Jesus. Gordon puts it this way:

"Every single one of us is significant to somebody else. The people to whom we are significant will catch this thing from us if they know that we are, beyond a shadow of a doubt, absolutely devoted and loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the trouble is that in those moments we think of as off moments, others decide whether or not we are truly committed. The times a person says, 'I must talk to you,' or when we are weeding the garden. Or, working in an office. Grading a road. Nailing on a molding or painting a room. Cooking a meal. Speaking to a child. These are the times and places where the other person decides who we really are. There can be no 'off moments' for Christians if our faith and its vitality are to be contagious."

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. The beginning of Holy Week, the most important week in the Christian year. We must all make time to come and serve him, follow him, be with him wherever he may be. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Great Vigil of Easter are all times we need to come and be with him. “Follow me,” he says.

And we need to listen for the Voice. The Voice that is for our sake, not for his. The Voice speaks to us so that we might know how beloved we are. So that we might know how well pleased God is with us. Once we hear this voice and believe it, others will see Jesus, in all that we say and all that we do. Amen.

*This sermon, written by **the Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek**, originally ran for Lent 5 (B) in 2018.*