

This week's passage from the gospel of John covers a lot of territory. It begins with a couple of Greeks, (meaning gentiles) wanting to meet Jesus. This interest by gentiles tells us that Jesus' impact has extended beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Granted these men were in Jerusalem to attend Jewish worship services and were already inclined to worship God but word about Jesus seemed to be offering something even more. We don't know if they ever did see Jesus but Jesus' response to Philip and Andrew (and whoever else was listening) indicates that God's plan of salvation was to be extended to the whole world. Therefore, it is not surprising for Jesus to say that when he is lifted up he "will draw all people to myself".

Those Greek gentiles are just the sign of the beginning of the Jesus drawing all people to himself, of all the people who would be drawn to the love of God in Christ. This love would spread across the ancient world, travel across continents to engage people of all races, colors, nationalities, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, men and women, and so on across the centuries until here we are today.

Jesus' role in drawing all people to himself comes at a cost. When Jesus says that he will be lifted up he is referring to his upcoming crucifixion. We are drawn to Jesus in the teaching that led up to his death on the cross, a symbol of the brutality and violence that humankind is constantly inflicting on itself. We saw horrible evidence of that in the murder of eight people in Atlanta, on March 16, six of whom were women, targeted because of the shooter's misogyny and racism.

Jesus will offer himself up in obedience to God and in so doing will draw all people to himself... but how, or why? What is it that draws you to Jesus? What do you find in the image of his tortured body hanging on a cross? How did you find this to be a symbol of hope?

Jesus himself knew that his death would not be pleasant – we hear faint echoes of the other gospels recording his time in the garden Gethsemane when he asks God to remove the cup from him. But Jesus is not doing that. The Jesus of John's gospel is saying "like why would I resist what the Father has in store given the opportunity to glorify God?" He knows it's gonna hurt (after all, who would want to be tortured and crucified) but there is more involved than death.

Jesus uses the metaphor of the seed falling to earth and dying to bear much fruit. But the seed doesn't really die, does it? The seed changes and those changes generate new life. Jesus died to give us new life, a new life in him and through him a new relationship with God, a relationship that will extend beyond death.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says:

*But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.*

*And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (1Co 15:35-37 NRS)*

*So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.*

*It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. (1Co 15:42-43 NRS)*

*Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

*For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1Co 15:51-53 NRS)*

Yes, Jesus will die in being lifted up but there is more to it than that. John considers the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to be one continuous action that he expresses as glorification. This is why Jesus says "Father, glorify your name." and then God responds "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The fruit generated by his death is the spread of the Word, the invitation to eternal life that shows up when we establish communities to love and serve God and to love and serve each other.

The catch is that we who are drawn to Jesus, we too become seeds, seeds that are to die to ourselves so that we may live for Christ, to be salt and light, to live life in the fullness of our belief and trust in God, to act in kindness and mercy and compassion, to care for those who cannot and sometimes will not care for themselves, and to do this in love, the love that Jesus showed us, love unto death on the cross. Offering ourselves in such a way is a sacrifice. It may require us to risk what we hold dear, our lives, our possessions, our positions in work or in society, and even our families. Admittedly this is not easy and we may count our successes in moments rather than days but that is what Jesus is asking of us because when we live like that our lives and the lives of those we touch will bear much fruit.

Amen.