

Lent Five

March 29, 2009

O God be in my mouth as I speak for you and fill this place with your great grace, that we may leave this place less of what we used to be and more of what we ought to be, through Jesus Christ, our Lord Amen

If I said the name of Philip Brooks to you this morning, the musically inclined might recognize that he was the author of the Christmas hymn, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”.

He was as well a popular 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher and served for many years as rector of Trinity Church in Boston. He also had a strong hand in its beautiful architectural design.

There is however, one interesting feature that is only visible to those who have had the privilege of preaching in the church.

Brooks had these words carved on the “inside” of Trinity’s pulpit, “*Sir we would see Jesus.*”

These are the words that we hear Gospel as some Greeks speak to the disciple Philip.

These Greeks were more than likely, non-Jews, who were fascinated by Judaism’s antiquity and its strong ethical teaching.

In Jesus’ time, they were known as “God fearers” and were numerous in the first century.

Most of them would have converted to Judaism had it not been for the requirement for circumcision.

Their hesitancy to take this final step is probably best captured in the old Flip Wilson joke about his religious faith.....he always said he was a Jehovah bystander.....to be a witness required commitment and he just wasn't ready to make that kind of promise.

This is what many of these "god-fearers" were like. They were interested bystanders, not quite ready for full commitment but willing to participate as much as they could.

In our Gospel story this morning, these God-fearers, along with Jesus and his disciples, are on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

For the Jewish people, Passover is the preeminent religious festival. It celebrates the release of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.

Passover marks that special time in human history when the Jewish people walked through the waters of the red sea and emerged on the other side as God's free and chosen people.

However, against this backdrop of festive celebration, Jesus knows he is on his way to Jerusalem to suffer, die on the cross, and be raised again.

When Philip tells Jesus that these Greeks had asked to see him, Jesus exclaims, "*the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*".

In describing John's gospel, biblical scholars often write that the gospel is divided into two parts, a book of signs and a book of glory.

In the book of signs, Jesus performs seven miracles; turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana, healing a man born blind. These special signs culminate in the great miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Throughout John's gospel though, Jesus makes continued reference to the notion that his hour, his time has not yet come.

He says to his mother at the wedding , "My hour has not yet come."

In another early part of the Gospel, when encouraged by his disciples to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, Jesus says, "his time has not yet fully come".

But when these Greeks ask to see our Lord, this appears to be a key turning point in John's story. He now knows that the hour had come for him to be glorified.

Jesus' response to their request, also reminds us that our Lord's idea of glory and our idea of glory are radically different.

For Jesus to be glorified was to embrace the cross, the ultimate symbol in his time of human degradation and suffering.

*"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...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...And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself."*

Because non-Jews were now seeking to meet him, Jesus knew that his mission was no longer restricted to Israel but had become a universal message of hope and salvation.

For Jesus, glory was always about giving more to others.

He demonstrates this when he speaks to Nicodemus about being born again, when he meets the Samaritan women at the well and offers her living water.

And in the most vivid way imaginable in the final chapters of John, Jesus gives himself to his followers by washing their dirty dusty feet. *Unless I wash your feet, he says to Peter, you have no part in me.*

In making the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, Jesus gives himself to the entire world and demonstrates to all humanity the true depth of God's love and glory.

I know that until recently the America myth has been that glory is always about having more, having more money, more prestige, and more power.

But one spiritual advantage of the recent economic uncertainty is that many of us have a better appreciation for type of glory that God offers from the cross.

And we need to hear yet again the message that true glory is to be found in what we are willing to give to others.

*Sir, we would see Jesus*, is not just a request that the Greek's made in Jesus' day, it is a cry that we continue to hear in a world that still sadly contains so much uncertainty, suffering, and violence.

This is what I think Philip Brooks was trying to get across to those who preached the gospel in Trinity Church.

He recognized that all people are in every age desperate for the good news of the gospel. They want to see the real Jesus.

They want to meet again, the living Word of John's gospel and the incarnate the son of the living God.

They want to meet someone who will heal the sickness of their bodies (and souls), and feed the spiritual and physical hunger of our deepest needs.

And I believe, we all in some way wait for someone who can resurrect the dreams of those of us who feel we are dying.

And if our church is serious about helping folks to meet Jesus, we must remind ourselves that they only see Jesus in each of us.

Do they see him in us? Do they see the Servant Lord who washed the feet of his friends? Do they see the man who didn't judge the woman at the well but offered her new life? Do they see the prophet who chased the money changers out of the Temple? Do they see the healer who made the blind to see?

If we are serious about inviting people to see Jesus in each of our lives, then we must go ourselves and sit at his feet, let him heal us, feed upon the bread of life he freely offers.

And most importantly of all in the coming Holy Week, Jesus calls us to stand at the foot of his cross and wonder again at the glory that God has wrought through the life of this one man.

A few years ago a rabbi at a large reform synagogue published an editorial in the local newspaper on Christmas day. He said, "I like Christmas, and I like Christians. My only problem is that they need more Jesus.

This coming Holy Week, I want to invite all of us here to make an effort to have more Jesus in our lives.

To recognize that as folks continue to seek comfort and reassurance in these difficult times, they will look upon all of us seeking that living word that can bring hope again to their broken lives.

“We would see Jesus”, let it be our constant prayer that Jesus will always be found in this place and in each of our lives. Amen