

So the Greek visitors are left wondering, as Jesus wonders aloud to the crowd whether or not they are fully prepared to learn from what is soon to happen. John, with full benefit of hindsight, knows what will happen. A revelation is coming soon for everyone :

“When I am lifted up (says Jesus) all of humanity will be drawn to me.” The mystery of God – whatever form it takes – is powerfully attractive. Not just for the curious, but for those who desire to know more and know God better through the sharing of and an experience in this ‘lifting up’ – this powerful moment in the story of Jesus, around which the whole of the Christian faith turns.

We are slowly moving toward the heart of the thing. Soon we will once again review the final days of Jesus earthly journey. Soon we tell the story that ends with a new beginning; crucified, died and risen – that is the centre of our faith. Raised by the power of God – raised after a Sabbath ‘rest’; raise in glory (and mystery) so that all humanity might be drawn to, not just the story – not just the person of Jesus – but to the evidence of God’s promised presence.

But for now the Greeks who are eager to see Jesus must wait while Jesus offers a parable – while he tries in vain to help people understand what is at stake.

Those who love their life will lose them – but lose your life and you will find eternal life. These words are not exactly the most soothing in the gospels. We love life – most of us love our lives – but Jesus is speaking of loving life that excludes God – life that leaves out the author of life.

He has done everything to demonstrate what life in God’s service – life in God’s presence – can be like. The sick are healed; the wounded and outcast are made whole and welcomed. The dead receive new life. This is life in service of God.

This is selfish, self-made living put to death. It is not a new idea – though Jesus will offer the most extreme, the most excellent example of the idea...

“Surely the days are coming,” says the Lord through Jeremiah. A covenant that will not be broken. Release from a different kind of slavery. “I will put my law within them, and I will be their God and they will be my people.” The prophet also tried (in vain) to offer people a chance – to draw attention to the magnificent determination of God to save us from ourselves. We think we understand, but our grasp of the situation is tenuous, at best.

To call ourselves ‘God’s people’ is not enough. The designation must take flesh and live. The words require utility; animation. There must be evidence of God’s presence and evidence of human engagement with the law – with the promise – with the reality of God.

The cross offers us the chance to take action – to do more than just ‘call ourselves’ Christian. Anyone can wear a cross. To be a disciple is to show evidence of the mark of God in a life – in decisions and activities that affect our lives and the lives of others **IN A DEMONSTRABLY POSITIVE WAY.**

This now is the mystery of a life of faith in the twenty-first century – that we might find a way to witness – to show evidence that we have been captivated by the strange and wonderful life-giving story of God at work - of Emannu-El (God-with-us) - in a way that reflects the live-giving, altered perception that comes from declaring ‘Christ has died – Christ IS Risen – Christ will come again.’

We’re a long way from that.

We would rather (or so it seems from a cursory study of the history of Christian interactions in society) stand on 'principles of morality' while ignoring the ethical nature of treating one another as beloved children of the Most High. We would rather claim some divine right or privilege that sets us above (or beyond) this foolish mortal scuffle – demanding (in our arrogance) that things would be better if only the rest of the world thought and acted according to our understanding of the divine.

This bias is centuries old in our faith tradition, and we are only a little bit closer to expunging that arrogant mis-interpretation of one particular set of Holy writings from our way of thinking and being 'the church.' Our arrogant bias rears its head whenever we are faced with a societal question that is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture (or appears to have been forbidden 2000 years ago for reasons that defy explanation in our current context.) So questions of women in positions of authority, or the proper treatment of children, or the notion of enslaving those who don't match our cultural profile, or the idea that there are a broad spectrum of mental, physical, social and sexual manners of expression that are each equally and delightfully human – questions like these bring out that old fighting spirit in the faithful. It's not a pretty sight.

The life we must abandon – the living that stands between us and a life in God's presence is not about the boundary between earth and heaven. The life of selfish certainty; the life of arrogant indifference; the life that imagines that God is ONLY on OUR SIDE...

If Jesus life, death and resurrection mean anything, we must stop seeing them as some sort of secret password to unlocking heavenly rest. This is God stepping

close – God making good on the promise to be so near that no one will need to say “know the Lord,” for everyone will know...

We must lose the notion that God’s promise is offered as some sort of particular privilege to those who know a particular story. Jesus’ life was one of gentle persuasion. He called people, not to himself, and not to a particular doctrine or tradition – Jesus invited people to lose their lives of secular indifference or religious purity and open themselves to the presence of God.

That invitation still stands – even to those of us who ‘know the story.’

We have much to lose, and even more to gain.