

LENT 5B 21-03-2021, The Reverend Lorna Green

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:6-16; Hebrews 5:5-14; *John 12:20-33*

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. '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. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Picture the scene.

It's the Boardroom of the Perth Stadium, and all the bigwigs are gathered around the highly polished table. They are having a crisis meeting, and the atmosphere is heating up.

Bigwig One is beaming as he says, "The city is heaving- all the hotels are full, people are camping out, tickets are being scalped for huge amounts of money- it's a wonderful time to be in Perth now the World Cup has finally come to our town!"

Bigwig Two, grinning from ear to ear, adds, "What a fantastic opportunity this is for local business! The restaurants are booked out, the fast-food joints are running out of chips, and as for the merchandise- well, it's a licence to print money!"

Bigwig Three, from the City Council, looks a little stressed: "That's all very well, and we are thrilled about the increase in business; but traffic is a nightmare and emptying all the bins is impossible, the car parks can't cope, and as for the COVID restrictions- but it's all good, we'll be fine, everybody loves the soccer!"

Bigwig Four is a senior police officer, and he says proudly, "All our officers have had their leave cancelled and are on the lookout for any criminals who might see this as an opportunity to fleece the punters. We will keep this city safe and calm, don't you worry."

Bigwig Five, who has a radio show and reckons he knows the local scene better than most, says, "Have you heard about that bloke who's going around telling people they should give money to the poor instead of spending it on themselves? What's his angle? Seems like a trouble-maker to me."

Bigwig Four, the cop, pricks his ears up and adds, "Ah yes, we've heard about him and we're keeping a close eye."

Bigwig One jumps in: "That's the last thing we need- someone stirring up the punters so they won't want to spend their hard-earned where WE want them to spend it!"

Bigwig Six, who has been quiet until now, speaks up: "I've actually listened to him- you're talking about Joshua Wassname, aren't you? The one who sits in the park with the homeless people. I thought what he said was quite good; totally impractical of course, but still...."

Bigwig Two interrupts: "Oh come on, you can't be serious! We are trying to stage a huge event and make a decent profit, and this bloke just happens to turn up when the city is full of people...I've heard what he says, and if he thinks we're going to waste all this money on refugees and dole-bludgers he's got another trick coming!"

Bigwig Six says nervously, "Maybe; but he's got a point. Some of the top end of town people are listening to him as well, you know."

Bigwig Three, scowling, says, "We can't have this sort of disruption going on, not now -this is too important for our reputation. I watched this rabble-rouser coming up the Terrace with a crowd of reprobates cheering him on the other day, waving branches and singing religious stuff; they stopped the traffic!"

Officer Bigwig Four stood up, straightened his uniform jacket, and said, "Say no more. I'll get my lads onto it right away. Who knows, they might find some illegal substances hidden in his pocket if they look hard enough! Give us a reason to keep him in the cells for a night or two. Worth it, to keep the peace. Don't suppose I could have another couple of tickets, could I?"

All the bigwigs nod and agree, and then get down to the real business of making money.

This is, of course, a fantasy. The soccer World Cup isn't coming to Perth any time this century, and even if it did- surely the movers and shakers of our little town wouldn't behave like this, would they?

In this silly story, Joshua- another name for Jesus- is upsetting the powers-that-be, threatening their enterprises and gathering his own followers. His views are disturbing, threatening to those who stand to gain the most from the prevailing culture.

Back in his day, Jesus posed a threat to the ruling classes because he taught people to look at things differently. He said- yes, maybe it's always been done like this, but let's turn it upside-down and do it another way! People shouldn't be poor and hungry and homeless because others are greedy and selfish. Religion is supposed to help and support people, not burden them even more.

The Gospel tells us that when the outsiders came and asked to see Jesus- they might have been Greek, or just foreigners who weren't Jewish- he knew this was the moment that things would start to change. Once his following had grown enough to start attracting outsiders Jerusalem's leaders would no longer be able to ignore him. The threat he posed had escalated.

Jesus teaches us that oppressions and violence are never the answer, and then he shows us, by refusing to fight back once he's arrested. He rejects violence and then, by dying on the cross, holds it up for judgement, showing how useless it is.

Next Sunday we begin Holy Week as we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and remember the events of the last week of his earthly life. The Great Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day offer a continuous act of worship, drawing us into the experience as we journey with Jesus towards death and resurrection.

The Lord be with you.