

Rev. Christa von Zychlin
Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
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Lent 5

John 12: 20-33

GLORY! That's what NMSU basketball team was after.

Disclaimer here – since I'm still pretty new here I'm sorry to inform you that one thing about me is I know almost nothing about sports. I'm also a big believer in division of labor, and using the gifts you've been given, so that's why I let Pastor Wayne handle most of the sports talk in our congregations.

However, even I got caught up in the NMSU excitement this week. On Friday morning If you typed in NMSU - first thing that popped up was BASKETBALL!

Glory! Such grand hopes that the #12 seeded Aggies would upset the #5 seeded Clemson.

Men's basketball was bringing a spotlight to New Mexico, to NMSU, to Las Cruces – that's the thing about glory - true glory spills over on everybody associated with the team.

Glory.

That's what Jesus is radiating right here just past the halfway point of the Gospel of John.

He's been attracting the crowds.

He's made water into wine.

He's cleaned those insider-religious sales clubs - right out of the temple. Thank God.

He oversaw lunch distribution for 1000s of hungry people.

In chapter 11, he's done the ultimate thing – he raised a man from the dead: "Lazarus, come out!" he shouts.

And a man whose body should be stinking – walks out of his tomb.

You bet the spotlight was on Jesus.

And now it's not only the local *Jews*, who've heard about the glory, but here in John chapter 12 vs. 20

The *Greeks* are beginning to pay attention to this Jesus.

The Greeks are the elite of Jesus' day! It's like the international media is beginning to come calling.

"We want to see Jesus!" The Greeks said to the disciple Philip. (Philip probably spoke their Greek language, that's why they go to him first.)

Philip goes to Andrew, together they go to Jesus.

[please note, when the disciples do things together, things usually go well.

When they do things just by themselves [think about Peter, or Judas]– usually not so good. But that's another sermon)

So together they go to Jesus.

What do you think, Jesus? This is an opportunity to get your message out! You are getting famous!

But *famous* is not the point.

Shockingly, Jesus pays no attention whatsoever to these Greeks or to meeting with them. Not today. Later, Jesus will tell his disciples to go out to the whole world, to people of every language, and invite them in to the new life of Christ, the life of the church.

But in this moment, Jesus huddles only with his star players

Disciples Philip and Andrew (the rest of the world doesn't consider them stars, but Jesus knows they are)

And Jesus talks to them about real glory, what it means, and how to get it.

Back for a moment to NMSU sports-

KVIA channel 7 out of Las Cruces at one point this past week reported that “6 out of 8 experts” predicted NMSU was going to advance to the Sweet 16”.

They even a headliner on the KVIA website, that former president Barack Obama was predicting a NMSU win over Clemson.

(I’m sure hearing from Obama would be exciting for some of you and less exciting for others of you – but we won’t go there right now)

But this is what caught *my* attention in the middle of all the hoopla:

Head coach Chris Jans was quoted as responding:

"I don't think it helps us. It doesn't score any points for us," ... “... the bottom line is [all these predictions & media attention] “it's not going to have any outcome in terms of the final result.”

People of God, Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel are a little bit like that of a basketball coach before a big game.

Coach needs to get his players to focus. There’s a grand difference between fame & media attention, and actual results and glory of winning.

On a cosmic level, Jesus Christ is our coach, people of Trinity.

Jesus expects us to see the difference between attention, fame, money, -- all things that matter MOST to the powers of this world,

And the actual results and unending glory of being-- really being -- in the will of God.

Unfortunately for our usual way of thinking,

Success according to the will of God comes only through brokenness, humble, plodding service, and even death.

Like planting wheat seeds in the ground, says Jesus, nothing to see for your efforts. Nothing to see, sometimes for a long, discouraging time. But

We hang on to this hope, foolish in the eyes of the world, that God will take our efforts, our real, everyday efforts:

Our day to day jobs where we might not be all that appreciated...

Family life, where we may get tired of chauffeuring the kids OR
Negotiating terms of visitation with ex-spouses – but those negotiations are so important

We hang on in faith that God will take our church meetings
Even the difficult ones

Our plans for serving with the poor... as the God's Work our Hands ministry team gets revitalized here at Trinity

We trust God will take
Our hopes for reaching & teaching our kids, & kids of the neighborhood, maybe through VBS again this year -- if we get enough volunteers

Crazy, but we Christians trust God will bring GLORY out of all of that everyday stuff and effort.

Did you hear the voice of God in the reading today? Some people thought they heard thunder, some thought it was the voice of an angel, but it was actually the voice of God who says,

“I have glorified my name through you Jesus, and I will do it again.”

God will glorify his name through us, as we follow Jesus, people, us, the not so famous or great, disciples of Jesus.

Just a few more words about glory.

C.S. Lewis the British Literary Critic, adult convert to Christianity, and, also, more famously, the writer of the Narnia Chronicles, including the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, helps us to grab on to the Gospel words with gusto today and to confidently hope for glory.

C.S. Lewis writes: “if we consider the unblushing ...and staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Today the Gospel assures us there is nothing wrong with being dissatisfied with the status quo. It is not wrong to seek glory, in fact the Scriptures encourage it.

Jesus Christ tells us bluntly, “Whoever serves me must follow me; ... where I am my servant will also be. My father will honor the one who serves me.”

As I mentioned earlier, I don't know much about sports but I do know this: the great thing about sports, is that there's always another season, there's always another chance, there's always the hope – after many dry years -- that next year the Aggies will make Las Cruces famous, and we will share in that glory.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us a cosmic hope:

The seed is already planted. Jesus Christ has already died and risen. The glory has already begun. Our lights already shine. And we can shine brighter and brighter and brighter yet, in God's glory, in God's time.

Amen.