

Sermon Draft for September 14, 2025

Text: John 12:20–33

Sermon: “The Cross”

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ . . . And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . . . For this purpose I have come to this hour’” (vs 20–21, 23, 27b).

Thousands of people ascended to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the great feast of the Passover. Yet this particular year, many of them had an additional reason for being there. John reports, ***“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was [at Bethany], they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead”*** (John 12:9). Then, ***“the next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem”*** (12:12).

We're very familiar with what happened next. Some spread their cloaks on the road. Others took palm branches. The whole crowd cried out, ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”*** (12:13), while Jesus rode on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. But why were they there? John tells us, ***“The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign”*** (12:18). The Jews were seeking Jesus because he had performed the sign of raising Lazarus from the dead. As the Holy Spirit says, ***“Jews demand signs”*** (1 Corinthians 1:22).

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip . . . and asked him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (vs 20–21). Those were some strange fellows to come to the feast of the Jews. Sure, they came to worship. Yes, they were likely proselytes, Gentiles who had come to the knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But look at what these Greeks did.

They went to Philip, whom they knew as one of Jesus' disciples. They wanted to see Jesus, the great teacher, the wisdom of God. As the Holy Spirit says, ***"Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom"*** (1 Corinthians 12:22).

Here we are. We've come to see Jesus, haven't we? We also demand of Jesus a sign. We cry out just as Martha did, ***"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"*** (John 11:32). We wish Jesus would touch us and cure our cancer. We wish Jesus would multiply bread, so we wouldn't have to worry so much. We wish Jesus would speak and cast out our demons of fear and anxiety. We wish Jesus would call out the names of our loved ones to pull them from their slumbers spiritual or physical. We are like the Jews. We wish to see Jesus. We want to behold God's glory in great signs.

Yet here we are. We've come to see Jesus, but where is the sign? As great as it would be, we know better than to expect some great big show with the prophet waving his hands all over the place, calling on the name of the Lord to cure the leper (2 Kings 5:11). But we do seek wisdom. We do wish to hear from a great teacher. We wish that we could learn some short, sharp sayings, so we wouldn't be put to shame in the workplace when people ask us about our faith. We wish we could always have every answer to the doubts that arise in our own hearts. We wish we could learn rhetorical twists to combat the world's rebellion against God, show them we're smart and clever, not the dummies they think Christians are. Then we won't seem so foolish to the scoffers in the classroom. We are like the Greeks. We wish to see Jesus. We want to behold God's glory in great wisdom.

Thanks be to God! We get to see Jesus! Yet, like the Jews and like the Greeks, we don't get what we expect. We likely won't see a great sign. Our cancer may or may not miraculously go into remission.

We certainly don't get a miraculous feeding by multiplied bread and fish. We still battle daily against fear and anxiety. Our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who rest in their graves will remain there until Christ returns. Nor will we see great wisdom that will always put questions to flight. Doubts will still pop into our hearts. We won't always be able to silence the scoffers.

But we still get to see Jesus. Listen to how Jesus responded to the Greeks' request: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*** (vs 23–24).

It's as if Jesus said, “You Jews are here to see another sign. You Greeks are seeking wisdom. I will show you the glory of God.” We don't see the glory of God in great and mighty signs. We don't see the wisdom of God in eloquent rhetoric. We see the wisdom and glory of God in Christ on the cross.

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22–24). We see God’s powerful sign, His wisdom, and His glory in the Word of the Cross.

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” (1 Corinthians 1:18–20). God has made foolish the wisdom of the world.

The cross is utter foolishness. Who would worship a god that can be defeated so easily? Thanks be to God, our heavenly Father didn’t care about looking foolish or weak to us. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

He chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

By the powerful means of the word of the cross, Jesus draws us to himself. As he said, ***“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself”*** (v 32). The nothingness of the crucified God-man is now our righteousness. The foolishness of holy wisdom on the holy cross is our sanctification. The weakness of the precious blood spilled on the cross is now our redemption. By Christ’s death on the cross, our sins are forgiven. This foolishness of God is wiser than men. This weakness of God is stronger than men.

By means of this stumbling block, Jesus has shown his great power in salvation. By means of this folly, he has shown that the lowest of his wisdom is infinitely higher than the wisest of all mankind. There, hanging on the cross, Jesus calls us to forsake the glory we think we see in strength. He calls us to abandon the glory of human wisdom, logic, and reason.

Instead, he calls us to himself, because there on the cross he put to shame all the glory of this world including all its strength and wisdom. There he put death to death and showed the means by which he gives to us life and salvation. There he won for us what all the strength of the world couldn't muster. There he accomplished for us what all the wisdom of the world cannot fathom.

When Jesus saw that the time was drawing near for his Passion and death, he said, ***“Now is my soul troubled”*** (v 27). But what should he say? He wouldn't abandon this weighty task. No, he was born so that he could bear your sins to that cross. He lived his life perfectly so that his death could be a propitiation for our sins. He performed the signs and revealed the wisdom of God all to point forward to this one instant this one purpose fulfilled in his crucifixion. As he said, ***“For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name”*** (vs 27–28). The voice booming from heaven was for the sake of the crowd. It is also for our sake.

The Father said, ***“I have glorified [my name], and I will glorify it again”*** (v 29).

And glorify his name he did. On this holy day, we commemorate and focus not on a few pieces of wood but on the holy Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. There on the cross, the strength of God was demonstrated. There on the cross, the wisdom of God was revealed. There on the cross the Father glorified his name by glorifying the Son of Man and winning for us victory over the impotent strength and foolish wisdom of the world.

We wish to see Jesus. We wish to see his signs, hear his wisdom, behold his glory. But we get far better than we wish. He satisfies our ears and calms our hearts with the word of the cross. By this word he delivers to us everything he won there on the cross. Because the word of the cross is the power of God.

Amen