

**- Saint John's Pulpit (March 21, Fifth Sunday in Lent)
- "From Leaving to Living" John 12:20-26**

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Discernment

Discernment... this word is very familiar to us, especially when we become Christians. Mostly, we have been asked to discern God's will and time. So, Christians need to be sensitive to God's call and be careful not to be in spiritual dormancy.

Now we are going through a season of Lent this year. To all clergies who requested their appointment change, this season is tough, because their new appointment is released around this time. For me, my Lent in 2014 required a lot of patience and prayer when I expected a new appointment in Virginia from Minnesota Conference.

At that time, I was serving one Korean church in Minneapolis. After four years of ministry, the church began to grow a lot. But my serious concern was to find the best-fit Children's Hospital for my son's treatment. Ironically, Minnesota was a well-known state for wonderful medical care like Mayo Clinic. But the best clinic for my son was in Norfolk, Virginia. Hannah and I treasured this in our heart deeply and understood that God wanted us to move to Virginia Conference.

However, I was not sure whether this could be a sign from God. My ultimate question was this. Does God move His pastors because of their individual or family concerns? What about God's churches and congregations?

In the meantime, my congregations and I got a great offer from one of our neighboring churches. As that church is going to close, some remaining congregations wanted to join my church! Although they had lots of choices to join their new church, they strongly wanted to become my congregations because they thought that my serving church was healthy and evangelical.

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." John 12:20-21 NRSV

From that moment, I began to meet not only my church congregations but also another group of people who wanted to join and their pastor to discuss this merge process. All things were exciting, graceful, and spiritual. Bishop deeply concerned, cheered, supported, and prayed for this process.

While all people were excited to see this change, I was trying to listen to God. Then strong confidence came on me that this is God's call for my moving. For my son's treatment, Hannah and I have prayed for our new appointment in Virginia.

Finally, God answered our prayer by this unexpected and wonderful merge plan. I believed that this merger needs a new pastor in terms of pastoral care without bias or a sense of ownership. Although there were a few congregations to join, I believed that they have the right to be cared for by a new pastor without weighing on parenting church. The hour had come, then moved to Virginia! This was what happened to me and my family about seven years ago.

Jesus knew that the time has come...

The story today where we can see in the Gospel of John only is telling about Jesus' discernment. It begins with some Greeks visited Jesus. Actually, the Gospel of John was written much later than other Gospels. The main target was people in Greco-Roman culture (For example, the Sea of Galilee is called the Sea of Tiberias in John in which we easily know the influence of the

Roman Empire). If so, the visit by some Greeks was a really good sign, because Jesus' ministry (or movement) began to see fruit!

Here is a question. How could these Greeks know Jesus? Among many ideas, one powerful interpretation is from the story of Jesus cleanses the Temple (John 2:13-25). The place where Jesus cleansed the Temple was the Court of Gentiles on Passover. This place was the only place to open all people. Thus, we can easily assume that these Greeks saw Jesus, and were impressed by Him.

One joy to see from this story is a rediscovery of two disciples, Philip and Andrew. Indeed, among Jesus' twelve disciples, we usually know only a few disciples. Judah was a betrayer. Peter, James, and John were more highlighted than other ones. If so, to know about Philip and Andrew through this story is a gift from God!

²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. John 12:21-22 NRSV

Philip and Andrew- they were the only two disciples who had Greek alphabet names. This means that these Greeks felt affinity for Philip and Andrew. It makes sense! Plus, Philip and Andrew were disciples who could see hope from a little thing. When a little boy tried to offer his bag lunch to Jesus, Andrew appreciated his offer and brought this boy to Jesus.

⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" John 6:5-9 NRSV

It is true that the role of Philip was not like Andrew, but it is also true that Philip and Andrew played an important role in relaying this boy to Jesus making this miracle. Likewise, in the story today, Philip and Andrew are bringing these Greeks to Jesus Christ. They certainly knew the joy of bringing people to Jesus!

Through all these things around Jesus, Jesus eventually felt that he can move forward to his death on the Cross. To Jesus, this visit by some Greeks was good enough to know that His mission is going to be completed in this world.

²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ 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. John 12:23-24 NRSV

Serve: Church DNA

It is Spring. Time to plant. We plant something with a high expectation to see much fruit. To make this happen, we study, ask, read, and do googling. Mostly we concern about seeds, soils, fertilizer, water, temperature, tools, and skills. It is true. But Jesus' approach was different. To bear much fruit, a grain of wheat should be buried and dead.

Don't you think that this teaching resonates with us? To see grow churches Christians need to know how to serve others. It is not from programs, skills, and workshops. Just like a little boy who served Jesus with his bag lunch, some Greeks who visited Jesus and became seeds for evangelizing their ethnics, and Jesus who sacrificed himself to save us... The Gospel of Jesus has been done through serving others and sacrificing oneself.

A week ago, Barbara Turpyn shared this DNA (Serving others) through her wonderful sermon. In speaking of supporting UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), she encouraged us to serve our neighbors with our prayers and supports. Although we are going through this difficult time, please take a moment to think about our neighbors and how to serve these people. I believe that this is the best way of making our Lenten journey more meaningful and spiritual.

²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. John 12:25-26 NRSV