

Series: Path to Glory

Title: Born to Live, Born to Die

Text: John 12:20-33

Proposition: Everyone can walk the Path to Glory by taking these steps to change.

Key Word: Steps: Letting go...Dying to Self...following Christ

Jesus is enjoying the most thrilling moment of his life. He has just finished being the guest of honor in the Palm Sunday parade. His enemies, the Pharisees, have finally admitted defeat by saying that the whole world has gone after him and there is nothing that they can do about it. This is this poor, wandering preacher's shining hour. But the opportunity for his highest honor is yet ahead. We read that certain Greeks who are visitors in Jerusalem request a private audience with him.

It may seem odd that some Greeks were in Jerusalem. However, they were the ancient world's curious tourist and the original seeker. They loved to wander from one place to the next just to see what was around the next bend. It was quite common for Greeks to go from one teacher to the next to learn more about the latest world view. I suspect that they were curious about this radical Jewish teacher who overturned tables and chased out traders and vendors in the temple's gentile courts. Certainly, curiosity about Jesus has driven many a seeker to find out more about Him. I suspect the curious are here today.

So they seek out Philip, believing that his "Greek" name revealed openness to outsiders. Philip didn't quite know what to do, so he asked another Christ-follower to give him some assistance. Andrew knew exactly what to do. He led them to Jesus. Andrew knew that Jesus always welcomed interruptions. He was never inconvenienced by outsiders. A woman touches his cloak, children rush to his knee, a blind beggar shouts, a

little man climbs a tree, a thief speaks on the cross. And every time, these unscheduled interruptions from seekers guides us into deep places where Jesus heals and teaches. And that's what happens here. Because of these seekers, Jesus teaches us an important lesson. We're born to live, born to die. We see this in the tension he feels between a temptation to live for human glory and his desire to die for the glory of His Father.

Listen again to what Jesus said, *"The time has come for the Son of Man to be given his glory. I tell you for certain that a grain of wheat that falls on the ground will never be more than one grain unless it dies."* Jesus has no trouble handling the acclaim of the masses that shout "Hosanna" and wave the palm branches. Even the reluctant recommendation of the Pharisees does not faze him. But to be sought by the Greeks, this is the temptation that tests his resolve. We can see how enticing this would be for an unschooled carpenter from a despised town. Suddenly he had the attention of the ancient world's upper class and the intellectuals. Jesus confronted the lure of human ambition. Here is where his cross begins. Here is where death and life come into tension. Here is where we too must confront and overcome the lure of earthly ambitions and the applause of the crowd. Just like Jesus we too can overcome such temptations by taking these steps toward glory.

What were Jesus' steps? First, He let go of "crowd pleasing" to receive outsiders. John notes that at the time of a Jewish festival Philip and Andrew went to Jesus, representing the Greeks, bringing their request. The temple area was filled with worshippers, Hebrews, Pharisees, Priests, Scribes, and seeking Greeks or non Jews. Even

though the Scriptures are not quite clear, I believe that these seeking Greeks accompanied Philip and Andrew to meet with Jesus in the midst of these worshippers. We do see though that instantly Jesus reminds them of one of his own metaphors. I suspect that he wanted these religious insiders to know more about why He came. He came to draw all people to Himself. All people include outsiders, those different than the religious Jews. He came for those who don't feel like they belong.

One day Tom noticed a stranger who stayed after a worship service. His head was bowed. He was unusual, an obvious outsider. He had on a purple, cut-away t-shirt and tattoos over large muscles. He looked like a professional wrestler, which turned out to be exactly what he was. He was upset. Many other worshippers ignored him, passing by him without even looking at him. Tom thought to himself, "What would others think, if I stop and talk with this man? I would stand out. Every one else didn't notice him, why should I." But Tom remembered a time when he was depressed because challenging things at work. A co-worker noticed how frustrated he was and offered some help. This co-worker's compassion changed his life. So Tom chose to stay and sat next to him and asked him whether he could help.

"No", he said. He wanted to go now. Tom asked him if he wanted to come to his home and talk with him. He said "Yes, how about one night this week." When he came over to Tom's house, he launched into a horrific story of abuse and neglect. He hadn't been to church in years. He had been unfaithful to his wife, violent to his children, and violent to himself with drugs. He was a mess. At the end, he said, "Do you know what I need?"

Tom knew exactly what he needed but wanted him to say it. So he asked, "What do you need, Dave?"

He said: "I need Jesus." This big man knelt on the floor and gave his life to Christ, and got up with his center of gravity now on Jesus. Tom let go of the temptation to conform to the crowd and reached out to an outsider. Because of his compassion the ruler of this world was driven out of Dave's life. Christ gave Dave what he needed, forgiveness and cleansing. And Tom along with Dave walked further down the path to glory. Every time we let go of the temptation to "please the crowd" and welcome those who feel like they don't belong, we see Jesus giving them what they need. And we walk further down the path to glory.

Next, he took steps down the path to glory by dying to selfish attitudes and actions. Many times Jesus used the simple word picture of a kernel of wheat. In other times his words were truth delivered to other people, but now the truth comes back to the Author as a matter of life and death when he says, *"Except a kernel of wheat fall into the ground and die it abides alone. But if it dies it brings forth much fruit."* The grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was preserved, as it were, in safety and security. It was when it was thrown into the cold ground, and buried there as if in a tomb, that it bore fruit. Does this mean Jesus? His mind races from the simple beauty of the parable to the very plain foundation of his preaching. A principle returns home. Jesus says a seed has to be buried and die so there will be many seeds. He's talking about his death on the cross.

Jesus said, "*He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*" Jesus says those who fall in love with themselves will love themselves to a lonely spiritual death. But those who are prepared to die see great things in life. It is when one buries his/her personal aims and ambitions that he begins to be a real use to God.

Swimmer, Michael Phelps had already won five gold medals in the 2004 Athens Olympics. He seemed certain to secure one more in the 4 x 400 medley relay. Phelps's teammate, Ian Crocker, had not been so fortunate. Fighting flu symptoms all week, Crocker's performance had been sub-par. Just as it appeared that Crocker would go home without a medal, Phelps gave up his position in the 4 x 400 medley relay, giving Crocker a shot at the gold.

Told of the gesture, Crocker nearly wept. "I'm kind of speechless," he said. "It's a huge gift that's difficult to accept. It makes me want to go out and tear up the pool." With that motivation, Crocker helped his team shatter its own record, winning the gold. Phelps unselfish gesture paved the way for someone to have a taste at glory.

The *Make-A-Wish Foundation* has been granting the wishes of children with life-threatening illnesses since 1980. Most commonly, children wish to meet a celebrity, shake the hand of the president, or go to Disney World.

Mak Shulist, a critically ill nine-year-old, wished to enrich the lives of others. Before a brain tumor took Mak's life on April 9th, 2004, he got the *Make-A-Wish*

Foundation to build something for his friends: a rock-climbing wall on the playground of Ellisville Elementary School.

Dave Knes, principal at the 600-student school in suburban Ellisville said, "We learned a lesson from a nine-year-old that even when we're going through tough times we should be thinking of other people and not ourselves." Lives are filled with glory because someone has prepared to die by giving selflessly.

Finally, He took a step on the path to glory by following His Father's will.

Deeply troubled, Jesus pleads His Father to save him from this hour. Then He instantly confirms his resolve to do His Father's will.

He also lays down the challenge for others to follow him, saying, "*Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.*" "Serve me" means doing things for Jesus; many of us know about that. But that must be linked with "follow me"—staying close in faith and obedience to him, through the troubling moments with firm resolve. Jesus said, "*Where I am, my servant also will be.*" *As you serve and follow me, you will be where I am.*"

On October 2, 2006, Charles Roberts walked into an Amish schoolhouse, dismissed all but ten young girls, and proceeded to shoot them before fatally shooting himself. Five of the girls died, five survived.

Six months after this tragic event, *U.S. News and World Report* returned to the scene of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, to find out how the Amish were coping. In their article,

"Moving On," the reporters told how the tragedy brought together Amish and non-Amish neighbors, resulting in a deeper sense of community. They stood together, comforting and supporting one another. The Amish immediately reached out to the widow of the shooter, extending forgiveness, and forgiveness has been what has moved these Anabaptist descendants forward through dark days.

Donald Kraybill, an expert on the Amish tradition teaches near Nickel Mines. He explained how forgiveness, in the biblical sense, is love letting go when wrong has been suffered. The Amish are convinced that forgiveness is the central teaching of Jesus. "They will take you to the Lord's Prayer—if you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven."

I suspect the Amish are like anyone else, some forgive other like Jesus and some don't. The ones that do though set an example that causes me to examine my own life and ask, 'Who haven't I forgiven?' If I serve and follow Jesus, who was troubled by those who would reject him and by the cross he would bear, then I too must freely, willingly bear the cross of forgiveness.

Jesus came to show us a new life. Many believe this glorious new life comes by conquest. Although Jesus believed that glory come by the way a cross. He teaches that life comes by letting go, by dying, and by following His way of forgiveness. Come to think of it, it's the path to glory.