**Sermon for Sunday 21st March 2021. Passion Sunday**

**Texts:- Psalm 119:9-16**

**John 12:20-33**

**Theme :- Glory to God**

**Prayer:-**

***May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing in your sight O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.***

***Amen***

**Introduction.**

**It is said that we all have our 5 minutes (or ten?) of fame at some point in our lives!**

**I wonder if you have had yours yet?**

**I can remember very clearly the moment I stepped onto the stage, March 1968, at the Albert Hall in London to receive my degree from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.**

I had been studying an external London degree and the Queen Mother was the chancellor of the university. There were hundreds of us present, all from different colleges, together with friends and family…

**Picture the scene** – I was there with my parents – we had travelled down to London together for the occasion. I had my newly acquired gown, hood and mortar board to negotiate (all hired) and as my name was called and I stepped out onto the stage all eyes were on me. Help! Not only that but all the women were required to effect a short curtsey too!!! (Happily we had learned this at school when Duchess of Gloucester visited))

**My moment of fame!**

Amazingly, I managed it all, without disgrace, before I moved out of the spotlight to join my fellow graduates in the body of the hall.

You may say that this was also **my moment of glory?**

Glory can be defined as ‘great honour or fame! (Webster’s dictionary)

I had succeeded in my studies and was entitled to add some letters after my name – a **great honour**? My fame was stepping into the spotlight.

**However all is not as it seems – to put it into context:-**

**Yes – I had succeeded but it had been a very painful journey.**

I contracted glandular fever when I was taking my A levels which affected my results and I ended up studying on a degree course, hastily chosen and not really suitable for me. Suffice it to say that I had many trials and tribulations en route and many times felt like giving up. However I managed to scrape through in the end.

To add insult to injury I had a very heavy cold on the day of my graduation and had one of my dad’s large handkerchiefs concealed in the sleeve of my gown. My nose was also glowing rather red!!!

I’ve got a photo to prove it somewhere!

So – at the time it didn’t seem like a great victory. I think I probably went to bed early with a couple of asprins that night!!!

**So in our Gospel reading could we describe Jesus as achieving great glory, fame and honour?**

**How is he getting on?**

**It appears that his fame is spreading.**

**We join the reading at the time of the Passover Festival in Jerusalem.**

There would have been great crowds of people there; we hear there were some Greeks amongst them.

They approached Philip, one of the disciples, with a request that they would ‘like to see Jesus’.

Greeks were famous for their curiosity and seekers after truth. They would almost certainly have already heard about Jesus riding into Jerusalem, on a donkey, to the acclaim of the crowd. They had also probably heard about his actions in the temple when he overturned the tables of the moneylenders. They may well have heard more stories of his preaching and healing and wanted to find out more, first hand, for themselves.

**Again – picture the scene**. The streets of Jerusalem are narrow and there would be many people jostling about. How could the Greeks find Jesus? Somehow they came across Philip and realised that he was one of the followers of Jesus. Philip is seemingly a Greek name and would have been familiar to them. – (I am reminded that our very own Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, is of Greek extraction. Coincidently, his mother is buried in a grave in Jerusalem! We passed her resting place, on our Holy Land Pilgrimage, as we walked down from the Mount of Olives one day)

Jesus starts off in promising fashion saying that ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’ but then he goes on with a bit of a riddle to talk about a seed falling to the ground to produce more seeds.

**What does he mean?**

It appears that Jesus is saying that as a seed has to die itself to produce a plant and then more seeds so does each of his followers need to die to their old life in this world and turn to follow Jesus as their first priority in order to flourish.

It is not an easy ride for Jesus though! He suggests that he might be tempted to give up and ask God the Father to save him from his fate, which we now know to be a horrible death on the cross. He is not for giving up though and calls out to God ***‘Father glorify your name’***

 If the Greeks were hoping for something spectacular they would not have been disappointed! Because:-

Amazingly a voice from heaven answers him.

***‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again’.***

Gosh! – some of the crowd thought that they had heard thunder but others the voice of an angel – but would it not, in fact, have been the voice of God?

I am reminded of the voice from heaven when Jesus was baptised which said:-

***‘You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased’*** (Matthew 3:17)

So whatever is going to happen a voice from heaven is clearly identifying Jesus as the Son of God and the events to come have God’s seal of approval.

Jesus tells the crowd that the voice is for their benefit, not his. Also that he is expecting to be driven out of this world but will be lifted up from the earth and will draw all people to himself.

**What a strange thing to say?** We know now that Jesus is referring to his death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection.

Following on from our reading, we hear that the crowd, and presumably the Greeks among them, are suitably puzzled and go on to say so.

Jesus finishes his speech by telling them that they will have to just trust in him!

**Easier said than done?**

We are not told how the crowd react. Did it all go down like a lead balloon? Did anyone understand? Were the Greeks satisfied? I think almost certainly there would have been expectation that more was to come. That they hadn’t seen the last of this man yet!

**So where does all the glory spoken of come in?**

**We know that Jesus has not had an easy ride up to this point:-**

In spite of his miracles of healing and preaching of love for God and each other, the authorities were out to get him for flouting their man made rules.

The devil was to tempt him with a way out of his sufferings only to be resisted by Jesus in the desert…

**I submit that the glory is in fact The Glory of the Cross!!**

On the face of it, Jesus was to be mocked by the crowds and end up dying an extremely unpleasant and ignominious death.

**Why?**

**In fact, by dying on the cross Jesus took the weight of our sin on his shoulders, so we could be forgiven by God.**

**Not only that - he has gone back to heaven to intercede, permanently, on our behalf and open up the door, which was closed, between us and God.**

**In dying Jesus conquered death and opened up Eternal life for us.**

**This then is the Glory - deserving of great honour and fame. In our thanks we, in turn, worship, praise and honour the name of Jesus for ever.**

**The cross itself was far from pleasant but it opened up a door of opportunity for us.**

In the same small way my experience of studying for my degree, struggles with adversity, and subsequent graduation, opened the door of opportunity for me. It enabled me to go on to further study and train for my chosen career.

**So what is the message for us today?**

**Jesus does not promise us an easy life – in fact the opposite! We need to give up our selfish desires in order to love God and to love each other.**

We may wonder where God is in this Pandemic. Well, Jesus, Son of God, was no stranger to suffering – which we recognise particularly today on Passion Sunday. But he does promise to be with us always and to share our suffering if we trust in him.

He asks us to ***‘love our neighbour’*** and there is no greater need for this during these difficult times. How inspiring it is to hear of the selfless work of our front line NHS workers, carers

 and emergency services and many other examples of compassion and sacrifice..

**This surely is our inspiration and guide today?**

**A prayer to finish**

**Prayer:-**

**Heavenly Father we give thanks for the loving sacrifice of your beloved Son on the cross for us. We pray that we may be worthy of his sacrifice and resolve to follow his teaching, trusting in him and spreading your love in the world.We bring this prayer to you in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**