**John 12: 20-36**

**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 honour.

**27**‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. **28**Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ **29**The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ **30**Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. **31**Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. **32**And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ **33**He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. **34**The crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the law that the Messiah[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+12&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26604f)] remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’ **35**Jesus said to them, ‘The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. **36**While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.’

It’s just Circle of Life stuff. No big deal. It’s just normal; basic stuff; simple.

You put a grain of wheat into the soil, and it dies.

But as it dies it gives life to many more grains of wheat.

It’s already happening all around you and you accept it completely.

Something dies and it bears much fruit. Or, as you might say:

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Does that sound right to you? It sounds a bit like a paradox. It’s a hard message to hear. Who can accept this teaching?

But it is no different to what happens all around us.

My grandson loves to sow seeds. He pushes them into the soil with his stubby little fingers and then swamps them with water from the watering can.

The seeds are dying as they germinate and grow.

Look, he will say, they are growing up big and strong, pointing at the seed tray where we sowed the broccoli seeds just three weeks ago.

Circle of life stuff. Theology a small child could understand.

This hard message creeps up on us out of the banality of everyday life.

Some Greeks ask Philip (shout out for St Philip!); they ask him if they can see Jesus.

Philip isn’t sure. What does Andrew think? Shall we go and see Jesus together? Yes, that would make Philip feel more comfortable.

Er, Jesus, some Greeks want to see you.

*‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’*, says Jesus. *‘Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour’*.

What happened to the Greeks? I guess we’ll never know.

The hour for glorification does come at surprising times.

Paul Schneider was a Lutheran minister in the Rhineland in the 1930’s. It was a small rural parish, remote and out of the way. The sort of parish you send troublemakers to.

He was conducting the funeral of a boy who had been a member of the Hitler Youth.

The Hitler Youth leader gave a eulogy in which he said the boy was now a member of the Hitler Youth brigade in heaven.

Paul Schneider said there wasn’t a Hitler Youth brigade in heaven.

The Hitler Youth Leader walked up to Paul Schneider who was standing at the head of the grave and repeated what he had said.

Paul Schneider said I can’t allow you to usurp a Christian burial with such blasphemy; the burial will not now take place. And he walked off.

For that he was put in a concentration camp where he was repeatedly abused and then executed.

Yes, the hour for glorification comes at surprising times. It creeps up on us and catches us unawares.

My Great Grandfather was a Lutheran minister in Baden in Germany in the 1930’s.

As part of his duties, he was the Chair of Governors of a residential home for children with learning difficulties.

He received an official letter about a re-organisation. The home was being closed and the bus to pick up all the children would arrive at such and such a time; please have them all ready, one small suitcase each.

His son, my grandfather, told him that the children were going to be taken away to be killed.

‘You do talk a lot of nonsense,’ was how my great grandfather replied.

And thus, he was able to avoid his hour of glorification.

If it wasn’t for ministers like Paul Schneider, I don’t think there would be a Lutheran Church in Germany today. How could a church survive today if, when the hour of Glorification came, it did not follow in the steps of Jesus? Willing to go where Jesus went, cursed and abused by man and yet honoured by God.

If every Lutheran minister had behaved like my great grandfather did, the church would have died. Or rather, it would have lived, and, therefore, it would have died.

It’s just like Jesus said.

*Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

It’s circle of life stuff. Just like a grain of wheat dies and bears fruit. It happens all the time.

It’s a hard message to hear. Who can accept this teaching?

But wait a minute.

Paul Schneider died and bore much fruit.

He and others like him gave their lives and now the whole Lutheran Church in Germany has life as a result. They will be reading this passage tonight in the churches in which Paul Schneider served. The word that inspired him in life and in death, bears much fruit through him.

His body was recovered from the concentration camp and buried in his churchyard in the Rhineland. Hundreds of people came to the funeral. It was still 1939.

This is how the graveside sermon ended:  *“May God grant that the witness of your shepherd, our brother, remain with you and continue to impact on future generations and that it remain alive and bear fruit in the entire Christian Church”.*

And my great grandfather, who lived, moved to another parish after the war. It was a small rural parish, remote and out of the way. The sort of parish you can send embarrassments to. Slowly over many years he rebuilt his life. He prayed. He led other broken people in prayer.

Jesus said, *Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

Did my great grandfather love his life so much that he lost it? Did he lose the hope he had in eternal life? Was the promise of eternal life denied to him because he acted on that official letter all those years ago?

The voice from heaven said, *‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’.*

But the people didn’t hear it properly. Some thought it sounded like thunder. Or maybe it was an angel. That was another theory.

Jesus had to explain: *‘Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’*

Jesus calls those who follow him to lose their lives so they may have life.

But he also tells them that he is losing his life so that all may have life.

Is that so hard to understand?

It should be pretty obvious. It’s just circle of life stuff. It’s happening all around us.

Paul Schneider, and others like him, gave his life so that the whole Lutheran Church in Germany could have life.

Jesus Christ gave his life so that my great grandfather, and others like him, could have life.

Just as a few gave life to many, so one gives life to all.

At one level it is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?

But at another level, it is the grace of God. And it is the good news of Jesus Christ.