

The Jesus Show – John 12: 20-33
Sermon prepared and preached by Rev. Don Hammond
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Even at this time in my life, I can change! As a matter of fact, I can identify a number of changes that I made in my years when I least expected them.

- I grew-up with rock and roll and that is the music I would listen to. Nancy and I met in high school at a rock-n-roll dance. In my early 30's I forced myself to listen to classical music that was foreign to my ears. In time I discovered that I was listening to classical music more than any other music style.
- Bluegrass music was another music form that hurt my ears. Again, I forced myself to listen to it and over a period of time discovered that I was enjoying much of it.
- I surprised my sons a few years ago when I mentioned the names of a heavy metal band that I enjoyed. I can change, and I am not going to use the excuse of "I am too old to change."

This past week introduced me to "blogging" and "twittering." I am a fellow who first learned how to turn a computer on in the mid 1990s. I am excited about becoming a blogger and a twitterer. Here is something of interest. Spell-check does not even include the word "blogger." I am ahead of the technology curve! Can you believe that?

There is one fairly new creation that I am having some difficulty adjusting to. The truth being told, I am a resistant convert to much of what is called "contemporary worship." I need to clarify something. When it comes to "contemporary worship," I find nothing uncomfortable about drums, guitars, bongos, lead vocalists or even power-point presentations. The part of contemporary worship that I am not a convert to is what I think of as "*The Jesus Show*." One person I know called it "The Jesus Show with 7-11 music" – seven words repeated 11 times.

A number of people in a congregation I served wanted to create a Contemporary worship service and I said fine, go for it. However, I have one expectation. It needs to be more than surface deep. Find music that has depth to it, because there is much contemporary music with substantial depth. It must have music that challenges the worshipers to something more significant than just being entertained. William Willimon tells of his response to this kind of music.

“I’ve learned to judge the value of a contemporary Christian song by how often it uses the first person singular pronoun...I, me, my.... I want to be near you...I want to love you...I want to know you”.

Therein lies my discomfort with such music. My favorite way of describing such music and worship is a “yea Jesus” time. It is like a game, and the worshipers are the cheerleaders encouraging everyone to shout “yea Jesus” hoping that will be enough to move him along toward victory. Because “we” want to be connected with a winner, we want to brag about our connection to the best team in the world, we want to feel better about ourselves. The gospel is not about what I or we want. It is about what God wants. It is not about cheering, it is about doing the same things that Jesus did. It is not about being a spectator; it is about being a player.

Worship needs to go deeper than a good show event or game that excites us. It is even more than being a good Jesus Show. Worship needs to confront us with who we are by speaking to who and what God wants us to be and do.

Today’s Gospel reading has Jesus saying something of great significance. It is a passage that even the Jesus scholars agree was something that came from Jesus’ mouth.

We read that “some Greeks,” who were apparently interested in Jewish worship, found Phillip and told him that that would like to see Jesus. Somehow they had heard about him. According to the scripture, there is no account of the Greeks ever meeting Jesus. Perhaps that was

not the important part. The important part was that what Jesus was trying to do had started, even before he died. The Greeks heard of him from someone and they wanted to “see him.” With that Jesus talked about the grain, or seed of the wheat. The only way that seed is going to reproduce is to fall from the stalk, die, get buried in the soil and have a new stalk of wheat grow from it. It is about new life growing from the dead. It is about his death and the life that will follow it that will come from those that seek him. It is about people following him and actively seeking to continue doing what he was doing.

During the Nazi occupation and control of France during WWII there is a story of the kind of following that I believe Jesus was expecting. Off in the rural part of France the SS were looking for Jews in a small village where Jews were known to live. When they arrived there were no Jews to be found. They left and not long after that returned without notice hoping to find Jews but there were none. That was their last effort and they never returned to that village.

What was odd was that there had been Jews in that village before the war and there were also Jews there after the war. A correspondent became curious and went to the village in search of a story. This is what was learned. In the village is a Lutheran Church. For years, even prior to the Nazi invasion, their beloved pastor would say to them every Sunday, “Someday Jesus is going to ask you to do something very important.” When the people of the village learned the SS was coming for the Jews, they took all the Jews into their own homes and made them part of their Lutheran families. When the SS came, there were no Jews to be found.

The correspondent said; “That was dangerous, all of you could have been killed for such an act.” “Yes,” was the reply, “but our pastor always told us that someday Jesus was going to ask us to do something very important and when that day came, we all knew exactly what we had to do.” That is the difference between believing and following. That is the difference between enjoying a Jesus Show that comes with no demands

of change and being a follower that comes with risks, hardships and demands. That is what Jesus meant when he talked about picking up a cross and following him. The cross that Jesus spoke of was not a cross of burdens like health or difficult relationships that one must bear whether one wants to or not. The cross that Jesus spoke of was a cross that does not need to be picked up. The cross that Jesus told us about is a cross that we can step over, around, or even ignore as though it was never there. Jesus never told anyone to turn around and take this cross upon you that I place on your back. It is voluntary. The cross that Jesus talked about is a cross that you have the choice to ignore, step around, or pick up. The French villagers picked up a cross they could have avoided. That is what Jesus was talking about, and that is the difference between enjoying a Jesus Show and participating in the Jesus work. That is what he meant when he said:

“If anyone serves me, that person must follow me; where I am, my servant will be. Whoever serves me will be honored by my God.”

Being a Christian was never meant to be easy, acceptable, or fun, and it is not even close to being a show. The only thing left for me to ask of you is this: do you still want to be a Christian?

Amen