

“My Heart Is Deeply Troubled”

John 12:20-33 ²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

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This past Wednesday morning I was listening to “Q” on the CBC while driving home from the doctor. Jian Ghomeshi was interviewing some of the biggest names in Canadian band rock from the late 70’s and 80’s: Mike Reno, the lead singer for Loverboy; Ra McGuire, the lead singer of Trooper, and Jim Vallance, a co-writer with Bryan Adams. It was a fun show for me. It took me back to my High School days and cruising with my buddy Darren cranking some tunes.

Jian asked them if there was a moment when they realized they had made it big. Ra McGuire told of a time when they were playing Memorial Stadium in St. John’s, NF, a smaller venue for them of only 4,000 seats. It moved him that the people were singing along with him. They knew the words as if they were there with him in his living room when he wrote the songs. In that moment he knew they were now a Canadian band not just a Vancouver phenomenon.

Mike Reno then piped in saying it happened for him when Loverboy was one of many bands playing a big rock fest thing at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. They were performing and the crowd was really into the music. He just happened to look over to side stage and there stood Lou Graham and another guy from the band Foreigner and all the members of the Kinks. They had come out of their trailers just to listen to Loverboy; i.e., Mike Reno’s songs. These were all people who had inspired him and here they were checking him out.

Then Ra piped in again about a show they did in Winnipeg at Pacific Hall. It was a sold out crowd of 100,000 and Winnipeg was his home town. Just before Trooper went onstage one of the guys told Ra he should take a moment and just enjoy what was happening there. Instead of running out on stage as they normally did, he walked out and there were his family and friends down front and the home town crowd cheering. He knew he’d made his hometown proud.

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Well, I wonder what Jesus would say was the moment he knew that he'd hit it big. I don't think he would say that it was the time he preached at his hometown synagogue and almost got thrown off a cliff. I rather suspect he would mention this moment when these Greeks came to see him. They were the first Gentiles to seek him. Jesus knew Book of Isaiah very well. There are several prophecies particularly in it (Isaiah 11:10; 60:1-14; 66:19-21) which indicate that the Gentiles seeking the LORD was a sign that the end times were beginning. So, Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” If he had left it at that, it would have sounded like a good thing. He, the expected end times Son of Man was ready to be honoured by taking his throne and saving Israel.

Yet, enthronement was not the kind of glory that he was after. He wanted to be honoured by the Father, by God. In order for him to receive honour from God he had to be obedient and, in his case, obedient unto death. Isaiah also has some prophecies about a Suffering Servant. He knew that as the Son of Man he had to suffer and die so that reconciliation between God and humanity could happen, so that he could bear our sins away and that by his wounds we be healed and all with the result of the gift of eternal life, life of an eternal nature be given to humanity in him and through union with him in the Holy Spirit. To be who he is and do what the Father desired he could not love his own life more than the Father's purposes and plans for us. Therein lay a struggle.

Jesus' big moment deeply troubled him? The Greek word for troubled could also be translated as terrified him. He was in a crisis of faith. His soul, his *psyche* not his heart, was deeply troubled. If you remember from a sermon a few weeks ago, the soul is the totality of our being as we stand in relationship with God, ourselves, and others. He was struggling with his relationship to the Father and what the Father had sent him to do and it was agonizing. Here we see just how very human Jesus was/is. It says in the Book of Hebrews that he was tempted in every way that we are. This struggle with the Father's will and his having to be faithful unto death really tried him. It was indeed possible for him to say no, but he didn't. He chose faithfulness over love of his own soul.

For us, the struggle to subject ourselves to the Father's will, is one we all know. Being the persons that the Lord would have us to be and discerning what it is that the LORD would have us do in serving and following him is deeply troubling and at times even terrifying when we consider the risks and the costs. Speaking honestly for myself, I would do almost anything the LORD wanted me to do as long as it catered to my ego, but if there is the slightest chance that I might be embarrassed, appear weird, or vulnerable, I struggle. If it is something I feel safe doing like preaching and teaching, no problem. But, when it comes to unsafe things like dealing with difficult people and difficult situations, I struggle. Yet, I can not imagine what kind of person or even who I would be apart from this struggle. In the midst of this struggle the Triune God of grace changes us to be more Jesus-like. Through this deeply troubling struggle God uses us to be ambassadors of reconciliation and ministers of his grace to those around us.

But, there's something else that is really special about this struggle to follow faithfully. Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.” We have the

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promise of Jesus being present with us and of being honoured by the father when we follow him faithfully. To give an example, I don't normally like to talk about the divorce that I went through. But, I can say that to the best of my ability I was as faithful to the LORD and as compassionate to my ex-wife as I knew I should be as Jesus' disciple and a minister in his church. The three years following it were years where Jesus drew me in close. The overwhelming feelings of rejection, failure, betrayal, shame, guilt, and disappointment would have been very destructive had not daily Christ spoken words of his love for me from Scripture. Moreover, initially and on a daily basis people would do things that were quite kind like send a card or call. There were also many times when I felt like I was the last person on my own little planet and somebody would just show up out of the blue and lift me. I was living in West Virginia than and some people might say that's just the way West Virginians are and I would agree but truly Jesus was at work through these folks and the little things that they did to support me. I could have let all those bad feelings turn into a major crisis of faith. Instead, I struggled to follow and Jesus made it very clear he was with me and moreover that he would lead me through. Friends follow Jesus. Immerse yourself in him. It is a struggle, but in the midst of that struggle is eternal life. Amen.