

POSSIBILITY PARABLES: The Paradoxical Promise

April 10, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world begins awakening from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor" is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the 'year of jubilee' of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Lenten season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: John 12:20-33

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 honor. 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 judgment 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^[a] to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

This Week: John 12:20-26

Just as the raising of Lazarus and Jesus' anointing by Mary both prefigured Jesus' glorification, so, too, does this arrival of the Greeks to see Jesus on Palm Sunday (Greeks representing "the world"). The encounter with the Greeks prefigures the church's future mission to the Gentiles and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's promises. This glimpse of that future marks the arrival of Jesus' hour because it is through Jesus' glorification – his death and resurrection, his return to God – that God's promises for God's world-wide people are fulfilled. Jesus' "hour" is this historic, spiritually decisive dividing line. The future to which the arrival of the Greeks points requires Jesus' atoning death and resurrection.

Jesus introduces this teaching about his death (vv. 24-26) with a brief agricultural parable about a grain of wheat. The significance of this parable for understanding Jesus' death and resurrection lies in the contrast between remaining solitary "just a single grain" (NRSV) and "bearing much fruit". In John, "fruit" is Jesus' metaphor for the community of resurrection faith that results from the rising wheat stalk, lifted up after dying and being buried in the ground (death and resurrection of Jesus). Jesus thus uses the seed parable to show "the Greeks" that one sees Jesus clearly only through the lens of his death and resurrection. In a similar way, one follows Jesus by letting go of the grain of wheat of their own life, planting it for the sake of others. That kind of life of service bears much fruit and is honored by the Father.

-Adapted from New Interpreter's Commentary Vol IX, pp 710-11

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Why do you think that the arrival of the Greeks (representing the non-Jewish world) to meet Jesus at Passover signaled for Jesus that his 'hour' had come?
2. When we think of someone being glorified, we don't usually think of their death. Why do you think Jesus associated his death (v. 23) with being 'glorified'?
3. Why do you think Jesus chose the grain of wheat to symbolize his death, burial and subsequent resurrection? How did Jesus' death paradoxically bear much fruit?
4. Jesus indicates that those who serve him must follow him. Short from martyrdom (unlikely for most of us), how do we resist clinging to our "*grain of wheat*," and instead sow for the benefit of others in daily life? Give some practical examples of personal sowing (serving) could bear much fruit.

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Prayerfully reflect about what you will do with your **Lenten Seed Gift** during this season. We invite you to let us know what you decided so we can celebrate the collective 'harvest' of grace on Easter Sunday!
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: John 12:24-25 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.*