

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, Cycle B, 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 51; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

What's in an hour? It is 60 minutes? Sometimes we can get a lot done in an hour and at other times an hour flies by and we wonder where it went. Speaking of "hour" or "the hour" or "this hour," an hour can also refer to a significant event.

The second verse of Amazing Grace states, "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed."

There is a lot in an hour. We find this truth fourfold in Jesus. Three times in our Gospel lesson from John chapter 12, Jesus uses the word "hour".

"The **hour** has come for the son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23).

"Father, save me from **this hour**? But it was for this purpose that I came to **this hour**" (John 12:27).

Much more is happening in "this hour" than 60 minutes. "This hour" will change the face of the earth. "This hour" will change earth and heaven forever. "This Hour" will be the hour of all hours.

The first time we hear of Jesus' "hour" in John's gospel is just before Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine. In response to his mother, Mary, telling Jesus the newlyweds were running out of wine, Jesus says to her, "**my hour** has not yet come" (John 4:21). In John 7:30 we read, "They could not arrest Jesus because **his hour** had not yet come. In John 8:20 we find a similar occurrence, "but no one arrested him because **his hour** has not yet come." Before the Passover celebration (after our scripture for today) John tells us, "Jesus knew that **his hour** had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (John 13:1). And finally, before his arrest and crucifixion John recalls Jesus' prayer to the Father. Jesus begins by praying, "Father, **the hour** has come; glorify your son so that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).

Wow! Eight times we hear of Jesus' "hour." Jesus' "hour" is like none other.

I want to go back to our Gospel lesson from John chapter 12. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem when he hears from two of his disciples that “Some Greeks” want to see him. In response he says, “The hour has come for the son of man to be gloried.”

According to my professor and Biblical scholar Dale Bruner, the original Greek sentence actually starts with an exultant “It has arrived’ (*elelythen*) the hour for the son of man to be glorified.” In his commentary, Bruner connects “It has arrived” signifying the beginning of Jesus’ hour (which we find in our passage today at the beginning of Holy Week) to Jesus’ final words on the Cross, “It is finished,” which signifies the completion or consummation of his hour. Bruner writes, “These two cries (“It has arrived!” and “It is finished”) at the beginning and at the very end of Jesus’ Jerusalem Week tell us a great deal about Jesus’ conception of his life’s mission: He came to die for the whole world and his death is the deepest gift of his life to us.”

What has arrived is Jesus’ hour to be glorified which we know now as the hour of his crucifixion. Bruner states, “In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ glorification is, primarily and paradoxically, his crucifixion. But this seeming contradiction has proved to bring, as no other single reality has, the greatest glory to God and to God’s Gospel, who is Jesus.”

Jesus’ hour is an hour of paradox and wonder, suffering and death, crucifixion and glory. To follow Jesus is to embrace the paradox of Jesus’ hour in our very lives. To follow Jesus is to embrace and open our lives and hearts to the mystery of the cross. Jesus’ hour sheds light on the paradox of our own hours - when we die to self we become alive to God and to our true self.

To die to self is a letting go. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin wrote, “The more we cling to ourselves and others, the more we try to control our destiny – the more we lose the true sense of our lives...It’s precisely in letting go, in entering into complete union with the Lord, in letting him take over, that we discover our true selves.” In letting go, in dying to ourselves, we enter into the mystery of Jesus’ hour.

Jesus goes on to tell us a very important lesson which would prefigure his hour, his life’s purpose. “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life

loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life” (John 12:24-25). When we hate the ways of the world, we become alive to the mystery of God’s ways of humility, service and love.

No death has produced more fruit than the death of Jesus. I love how God has woven the paradox of Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion, Jesus’ hour, in the very fibers of creation. We see it every spring as life comes forth from death and at every harvest when the fruit of the seed which died is gathered, providing abundant sustenance for life.

There is so much to Jesus’ hour.

Jesus turns again to his hour saying, “I am troubled now. Yet, what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus’ agony in the garden occurs just before he is arrested - when he cries out, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet, not my will but your will be done” (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

In John’s gospel, Jesus’ agony comes earlier in holy week. In fact, soon after he enters Jerusalem he not only cries out “It has arrived,” but also speaks of being deeply troubled. Jesus says, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour?’” (John 12:27a) Jesus knows his hour will be an hour of great suffering; yet, he also knows that his life’s purpose was for the glory of this hour. “It was for this purpose that I (Jesus) came to this hour” (John 12:27b) In all that would happen in and through his hour - Holy Week, the upper room, his passion, his suffering and death - God would bring forth resurrected life - all for the glory of God.

God can bring life in and through the struggling hours of our lives as well. Nothing is impossible for God. God knows our sufferings and questions. God knows the deep troubles of our hearts. God knows the hours in our lives we pray to be saved from. May God grant us courage and wisdom to trust God’s love and the mystery of God’s redemptive work in our own hours.

One of the most important Bible passages in the whole Old Testament is our passage from Jeremiah 31. It speaks of another profound reality of Jesus’ hour.

Jeremiah writes:

“The days are coming, says the LORD,  
when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel  
and the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers  
the day I took them by the hand  
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;  
for they broke my covenant,  
and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make  
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.  
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;  
I will be their God, and they shall be my people...”

Throughout salvation History God chose to make covenants with His people. God made 5 covenants in the Old Testament. Each covenant encompassed a larger family or group of people. Beginning with a couple, Adam and Eve, then to the family of Noah, then to the tribe of Abraham, then to the Nation of Israel through Moses, and finally to the Kingdom of Israel through King David.

Moreover, each Old Testament covenant possessed a sign of that covenant. Adam and Eve - the Sabbath; Noah - a Rainbow; Abraham - Circumcision; Moses - the Passover, and David, - a Throne.

As you can see, covenants truly play a pivotal role in Salvation history.

A covenant is much more than a contract. Scott Hahn states, “In a contract one deals with objects, but in a covenant one deals with persons.” Biblically, covenants were God’s way of uniting Godself in faithful relationship to God’s people. A covenant was a binding agreement and established or expressed God’s commitment to God’s people.

Jeremiah mentions the New Covenant “will not be like” the Mosaic covenant, which God’s people broke. Instead, the New Covenant will be written on the human heart.

The reason this passage is one of the most important and significant in all the Old Testament, is that Jesus also spoke the words, “New Covenant.” During Jesus’

hour, on the night of his arrest, Holy Thursday, Jesus was gathered with his disciples in the upper room for the Passover feast. During the celebration “Jesus took the cup saying, this cup is the **New Covenant** sealed in my blood, poured out for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.” Jesus’ hour, Jesus’ sacrificial offering, is the New Covenant sealed in his blood. This New Covenant is an everlasting covenant and it is for all people, all nations.

The final and eternal covenant is the New Covenant, a covenant which is not only for the Kingdom of Israel, but for the whole world. It is for all people, all nations, all kingdoms - “God so loved the world!”

In addition, the New Covenant has not one sign but two, Baptism and the Eucharist. Jesus said, “do this in memory of me” and “go therefore into all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded. And Lo I am with you always to the end of the age.”

Every Mass, by God’s grace, God makes present Jesus’ one eternal sacrifice of the New Covenant. Every Mass, God makes present Jesus’ one eternal hour. Every Mass, we celebrate and by God’s grace and the Holy Spirit we participate in Jesus’ hour. Every Mass we enter into the New Covenant and through the wonder of God’s love and the mystery of Jesus’ hour, our sins are forgiven and we join the hours of our lives with Jesus’ hour - Jesus holy, humble, wonderful, forgiving, life giving HOUR.

What a difference an hour can make! May this upcoming Holy Week uplift your faith and may we all open the hours of our lives for God to write his love, hope and mercy on our hearts - all for the glory of God.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve