

We've heard that the Gospel of Christ has turned the upside down. What exactly do we mean by that? Let's start with the Gospel reading today: The scene starts with some Greeks wanting to see Jesus. Jesus' word of grace was obviously reaching people far and wide. It was enough for our Lord to feel confident that this part of his mission is complete and he can now move to Jerusalem sure that he has drawn, and will draw, all persons to himself.

Their request sparks a series of reflections about the "upside-downness" that is the Good News. For instance, Jesus declares that the hour of his glory has come. We've been waiting a long time for this, mainly because Jesus keeps saying it "has not yet come" throughout the gospel! The time of glory has arrived. And "glory" is not what we might think, which is the first point. It is not Olympic glory, or promotion glory, or Valedictorian glory. It is cross glory, suffering glory, obedience glory. It is not glory as the world would define it, which is the heart of the upside down nature of the gospel.

Jesus next says, *"Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"*. It's not what we would expect, and certainly not what the world promises to us. "Hate" in John is not so much the sense of "detesting" something as it is "rejecting" something or someone. Used in this context, it represents a summary of the inversions Jesus offers. He says that those who do not reject the material values and world view of the present age will, like the material things they love, eventually pass away. Those who realize there is more to this life than trophies and fading accomplishments will enjoy eternal rewards.

Jesus rejects – and thereby inverts – the understandable reaction of most people facing his immediate future: *"What should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."* Jesus rejects fear at losing his physical life because he knows that God is with him, that, God sent him for the purpose of revealing God's abundant life. And this abundant life is so much *more* than the usual symbols of life: wealth, youth, power that the world offers.

Through this topsy-turvy lens, Jesus invites us to consider with care what we have come to value, what we have come to accept as "the way of the world," what we have come to define as desirable. What's more, Jesus promises that God is always at work, drawing life from death, calling what looks shameful something beautiful, turning suffering and desolation into a time and place of revelation. All of which can give us a new perspective on those parts of our lives that we feel are dying, shameful, or desolate.

God is at work...even in the darkest, hardest, loneliest parts of our lives. God can bring something good and beautiful from suffering. God not only does not abandon us during the painful times of our lives but is at work using those moments for something good.

*Be careful!*... saying that God is at work in and through the difficult and tragic parts of our lives *is NOT the same as saying God causes them*. I can't count the number of times where someone has suffered a devastating loss and I often hear someone say, "It's part of God's plan."

My caution is simply that we should not imagine that God causes the pain and suffering and tragedy of our lives as part of some larger plan. That interpretation might lend order and meaning to what can feel chaotic and meaningless, but only at the price of rendering God unsympathetic, heartless, and deaf to our cries of disappointment, hurt, and despair.

“The great inversion” of the Fourth Gospel is that amid the material and ever-decaying physical world of our universe there is a God who embraces the God-rejecting world in love (think John 3:16). This God who is crazy for us continues to be at work wresting life from death, and who surprises us by being able to redeem even the deepest pain, God can work through that suffering for good. God *never* desires that we suffer.

God is here. God is at work. God is not afraid of those parts of our lives that frighten us. God does not value us as the world does. God will not give up. God is on the side of life and love. And the love, mercy, and life that God offers is stronger than the hate, judgment, and death that too often colors the world.

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