

A reading from John's Gospel, the 12th chapter, verses 20-26:

Jesus Predicts His Death

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 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 Very truly I tell you, 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 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their 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.

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Three pastors walked into a bar. It was late on a Sunday night, a strange town, and the only place where hungry travelers could get a meal ... and a Lutheran beverage.

Little did they know that someone else was there. Someone who was also hungry. Someone name of Sarah.

Sarah their waitress was covered in tattoos and had multiple piercings from head to where ever. From the moment she approached their table, it was all that she could do to push past her feelings of awkwardness in the presence of the pastors. But, the ice began to break as one pastor asked a question, a question that only someone who had a unique understanding of tattoos would know. From there and over the course of the evening, Sarah began to open up about her "complicated" life beginning with breaking free of being homeless. And then her voice softened and revealed what was at the heart of the matter as she began telling the three pastors the difficulties she had as a single mom, a single mom who had been wounded by the church. Sarah, a professed Christian, talked about how grateful she was that the one thing her dysfunctional drug addicted parents had done right was to have her baptized soon after she had been

born. And what was troubling Sarah was that she wanted to do the same for her autistic daughter, but it was complicated. Complicated by the difficulties she had of being a single mom who had had painful experiences with the “rich” Church, her separation FROM and rejection by the rich Church, which included her own deep concerns about her role as a single mother.

She DIDN'T say, 'Sir, (or Ma'am), I want to see all your discipleship gadgets. She didn't say, give me a heaping portion of fancy evangelism gimmicks and regurgitated canned programs to make her “feel better”.

No, what Sarah was saying was, “I was baptized, but that was years ago. I want to get my daughter baptized, but it's complicated.” She was saying “I love that my family takes my autistic daughter to church, but that rich church won't have anything to do with me. And, “I want to get my daughter baptized, but maybe I should let her decide for herself, It's complicated right? There's not really room in the Church for someone like me. But what should I do about my daughter?”

In effect, she said, “I would see Jesus But it's complicated”

Sarah had been rejected by the judgmental Church, yet despite that she remembered and valued her own Baptism and knew she wanted the same for her daughter. As the discussion went on late that night with the three pastors, who listened to her with love and acceptance she was reconnected to the Body of Christ in a place where she, and even the three pastors, would have least expected it a bar in a sleepy little town.

The pastors were serving as Philip and Andrew, and the tattooed, pierced waitress was, for all modern-day interpretation, the Greek who would see Jesus. The Holy Spirit put that series of events together into one huge Kairos event, all for the glory of God and the good of one young single mom named Sarah and her little child.

People like Sarah are REAL children of God, with REAL concerns. Brothers and Sisters in Christ and this Society, when someone says to us, in so many words, “We would see Jesus,” our response has to be REAL. It cannot be a program that comes off to hurting, rejected people with complicated lives like some sort of cheap magic. Today's popular “church” culture has plenty of expensive, repackaged outreach and discipleship programmes to help pastors and congregations in their

mission outreach to the lost. These programmes go by many names but almost all have at its core the lie that the decisive works of man are the root of mans salvation, ignoring the truth that it was the decisive work of Jesus who made the decision for them.

When Philip and Andrew go to tell Jesus that people are looking for Him, Jesus doesn't send them back with a tract with "four spiritual laws" or a "Make your Decision for Christ" card to sign. Not at all. Jesus Himself said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." We're on "God time" – and EVERY hour is for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Evangelization and discipleship happen when the Holy Spirit puts people in our path, in their time, to be pointed to Jesus and drawn into His life of Word and Sacrament. We're given a very simple mission. Jesus said, "Go. Make disciples." So why do our churches invest innumerable hours and waste much needed resources trying to recreate something we already have? The means of grace *ARE* the means of *discipleship*, the *means of mission*, the *means of evangelism*, and the *means of pointing people to Jesus* when they are looking for Him.

The three pastors in a bar, who came in hungry for food, had no idea they were about to meet a waitress who was hungry for Jesus. They had no idea what would grow out of the seeds that were planted in those conversations. All that was necessary had been provided. All that was needed was willingness to be used in ways the three pastors had never imagined. The conversation led to exchange of contact information, a plan baptismal forward, and prayer. What God does with that remains to be seen. But at the very least, Sarah now knows that Jesus still loves her, and her family. She has seen Jesus through the hands and feet of Christ, and has new hope for herself and her child.

We pastors vow to make Christ crucified known. A large reason we are here in retreat is renewal. We hold ourselves accountable for our actions as called and ordained representatives of Christ. When we grow weary of particular aspects of our calling, or when we are tempted embrace a quick-fix of the latest ministry programs or "***pithy, repackaged pablum***", the Holy Spirit *reminds, redirects, refreshes, guides, and directs us* more intimately to **HIS** purposes FOR us. His ministry of Word and Sacrament, Confession and Absolution. The pastoral word that brings real truth and comfort to the terrified conscience. All

for the sake of building up His body, His Church, and for reconnecting the members who have been broken, disregarded, and even rejected. The people who are saying to us today “We would see Jesus.”

Jesus said, “Go.” You go and be open to the folks all around you who are asking, “Sir, Ma’am, we wish to see Jesus.”

Don’t let popular prepackaged programs for evangelization, discipleship or anything else keep you from MY means of mission. I’m in charge here, Jesus says, and I’m sending you. Go, baptize, teach, obey, and know for certain that I’m with you in all of this. Don’t let anything distract you, blind you to the mission and discipleship opportunities right in front of us.”

We pastors are vowed to be regular, consistent, faithful witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ – be it from the pulpit, at the altar, in life encounters with our parishioners, or across a bar in a tavern with someone we’ve never met before. Someone who is looking for Jesus and just happens to ask us to introduce them to Jesus.

It’s not really so complicated when we remember that the Holy Spirit is about connecting those who understand that ALL the hours belong to Christ ...to those who are hungering for Him.

It may well happen on a Sunday morning, in our normal element.

It might even happen in a dive bar, when three pastors are hungry and end up feeding the Word to the wait staff.

So may it be for us.

Gloria Patri ... Amen