

Rev Esma Collins-Marks – 21 March 2021

John 12: 20-33

The crowds were looking for a Christ who would "remain" and lead them into glorious earthly kingdom, but Jesus was talking about being "lifted up" and not being with them forever. The Jesus they wanted wasn't the Jesus they were getting.

I'm told these were actual answers that children gave in Sunday School: "Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark." "The epistles were the wives of the apostles." "Moses got the 10 Commandments at Mt. Cyanide." "King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 porcupines." "The men who followed the Lord were called the 12 decibels." And then there's my personal favourite: "Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night."

You'd expect kids to distort Bible stories once in a while, and it's kind of funny when they do it. But when adults distort the Bible that's usually not so funny. When adults distort Scripture, it's often because they don't agree with what they're reading.

Someone once said: "People don't reject the Bible because it contradicts itself. They reject the Bible because it contradicts them." People like that might know the Bible, but they just don't agree with it. And so they can end up not having their theological ducks in a row.

And that's what's happening in our story today. Jesus told the crowds that "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." And the people understood Jesus to be saying, He's not going to be with them long. He's going to be "lifted up from the earth". In fact, Jesus confirmed that by saying "The light is among you for a little while longer."

Now the crowds heard this and they knew just enough Scripture to say "Hey, wait a minute! That doesn't sound right! We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

Well, were they right? Was the Christ supposed to remain forever? (pause) Well - yes. The Old Testament spoke of the Messiah this way. The Messiah would endure forever. He would be a prince forever. His kingdom would last forever. And that's exactly what Jesus had come to do. He and His kingdom were going to last forever - just not quite the way the Jews had planned.

They were looking for a King who would throw off the bonds of Rome and lead them to be a powerful nation that rivaled the days of Solomon. But in order to do that, Jesus had to stick around. But that wasn't the plan. The Messiah that God sent wasn't the Messiah that they wanted. Jesus didn't fit into the box they'd built for Him. And that's a problem for a lot of people. The Jesus people get isn't always the Jesus they want. And a lot of the time, it has to do with this statement by Jesus: "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ really upsets a lot of people. It doesn't fit into their thinking. For the Jews (for example) the idea that the Messiah would die was unthinkable. And that was true not only back in the days of Jesus. It's still true (because the Jews still don't think Messiah has come). But that had been God's plan from the beginning.

Now, granted, the cross was a terrible way to die, and yet that was exactly what God had planned from the very beginning of the world. The Jesus folks get isn't always the Jesus they want. And so there are people who distort the Bible to get what they want!

But it gets worse: The idea that Jesus came to die for our sins really upsets some people.

Romans 5:8 says: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This is best illustrated by the story of the boy who had a new slingshot. He'd shoot at all kind of targets but could never hit anything. But one day, in his Grandma's backyard, he saw her pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit and the duck died. The boy panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile and then he looked up and saw his sister. After lunch that day, Grandma told Sally to help with the dishes. Sally responded, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today - didn't you Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? And for the next several weeks he did a lot of dishes. Whenever he objected Sally would whisper. "Remember the duck." After a while he couldn't handle it anymore. He went to his grandmother and confessed. His grandmother smiled and hugged him and said "I know, Johnny, I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. But I wondered how long you'd let Sally make a slave out of you."

Jesus died to free us from the slavery of guilt. He died to remove our shame and fear of punishment. And He died because He loved us. Don't distort the Scriptures. Realise how much God loves you, and respond to His free offer of forgiveness. Amen.