

## **The Time Has Come** **John 12:20-26**

### **Intro**

Many people would like to know their future or some sign about it. Knowing what's going to happen, they think that they may relieve their fear of uncertainty. But, knowing the future does not always have a positive effect. As you may know, Korean men have to complete mandatory military service. Serving in the army is challenging, so every young Korean man feels some pressure as their enlistment day approaches. I was 19 years old when I received my draft notice. It was just another ordinary day when I received it. A draft notice was just a piece of paper containing some information about my enlistment. But to me, it was not just a paper. Rather, the draft notice was a sign of my future, because it showed exactly what would happen to me 3 months later.

As I said, receiving a sign about one's future does not always have a positive effect. By knowing that I had to go into the army, I chose to follow the advice of the book of Ecclesiastes 3:12, "there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live." After receiving the draft notice, I often skipped classes and had a fun time with my friends as if there was no tomorrow. The bad news was that my GPA significantly dropped by more than 1 point. The good news was that my parent saw my school transcripts only after I enlisted.

What I want to say is that our lives are full of signs that we ought to watch for. Life is one big road with lots of signs. And we need to read those important signs. But these signs are often hidden in everyday life. These signs seem so trivial and ordinary that we often miss the important ones, including the signs of God.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading the sign of God in the ordinary life**

Today's scripture begins with a scene in which "some Greeks came to Philip and request that they want to see Jesus." Some Greeks believed in God and came to worship in the Temple during the Passover. During their stay in Jerusalem, they heard about Jesus, who was very popular among the people in those days. So they wanted to see Jesus and listen to his inspiring teaching.

Jesus was a celebrity in Jerusalem and many people wanted to see him. Some of them looked for healing. Some of them looked to listen to his preaching. Some of them just wanted to nitpick at Jesus' teachings. Whatever the reason, meeting new people with diverse personal backgrounds and intentions was a part of daily life for Jesus and his disciples. Just like having a morning coffee, receiving a request from someone who sought a meeting with Jesus was not anything new to the disciples. When Philip and Andrew heard that some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they might have said "just another ordinary day."

Unlike his disciples though, Jesus recognized the signs of God from ordinary events. After Andrew and Philip spoke to Jesus, Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Before this event, Jesus repeatedly told the disciples that his hour had not yet come. But when Jesus heard of this seemingly trivial request for a meeting from some Greeks, Jesus knew his time had come. Jesus was able to discern this as a pivotal moment. Jesus read the sign of God in his ordinary life. Perhaps, this is what we really need today... the eyes to see the signs of God hidden in our everyday lives.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Finding God in the Ordinary**

We tend to look for extraordinary signs from God. We search for the presence of God in extraordinary places such as the holy land or the church. But the whole world is God's House and sacred altar. Of course, God sometimes shows us extraordinary signs. But in many cases, God talks to us through the ordinary means of grace such as an ordinary Sunday worship service, an ordinary time of prayer, an ordinary time of reading the Bible, and in ordinary conversation with friends over a cup of coffee. Worship services are holy, but the time of eating and working... talking with your friends and family... all those times and places can also be sacred moments and places where God meets us.

Meister Eckhart, a German theologian and mystic, said, "Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there." We need to learn to find God in ordinary and everyday life.

2 weeks ago, I was about to start a very busy week. In addition to my weekly schedule, I had an Outreach Committee meeting, clergy study group, weekly clergy meeting, anti-racism task force meeting, baptism preparation class, funeral preparation meeting with a family, two bible reading classes. I knew I would be extremely busy. In addition, for months, my mind had been busy. As I shared a few weeks ago, I am planning to initiate a strategic planning team meeting. This meant that I was thinking a lot about God's calling for our church, mission ideas, resources, and many other things. Also, holy week, the busiest time of year for pastors, is coming, so my mind was preoccupied with many things.

Unfortunately, I became sick with an upset stomach on Sunday afternoon and barely ate anything for 3 days. Juhee, also developed acute abdominal pain on Tuesday morning at 5:00 a.m. so we rushed to the ER and were there about 8 hours. My busy schedule for the week... all my busy thoughts... had to be slowed down. God made me stop being so busy with works and plans, and rethink what was really important.

During this week, I told a church member that I was sick. He said, "if you need me, called me. I can help you with things." I said, "thank you." But he said, "I mean it!" That was just an ordinary conversation, but for me, it was a moment of realization. As a pastor, I have unconsciously thought of myself as pastoral care-giver, not a receiver. But we are the church and we all take care of each other in times of need. A pastor cares for congregation members and church members also care for their pastor as needed. I also realized that I don't work alone for the church, but we as God's people work together for God's mission. I felt that God gave me a sign, saying "Son, relax. You don't have to worry about strategic planning or working for the church. You are not alone. There are many people at Asbury who love me and love you." Your acts of kindness and caring words were God's sign of assurance for me that God is leading me and us on this new journey of church renewal.

Think of the whole world as God's holy temple and be more attentive to every moment of your lives. We will find God's extraordinary works in our ordinary life. And, I believe that we can be a channel of God's extraordinary grace for one another. Be more attentive to the ordinary things around you and the ordinary moments, both good and bad, in your everyday lives. When you drink your morning coffee... when you enjoy the warm sunshine after a long New England winter... when you receive a greeting call from your friends... or even when you listen to the tragic news of hate crime, ...be in that moment... then, you will find God's signs that lead us to the right path and God's grace that still fills in our ordinary life.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Self-Denial – A Way Toward Eternal Life (break your shell)**

Jesus was able to see the sign of God in his ordinary life and he realized that his time had come. He then, taught his disciples the way of salvation, saying, “I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever.”

The way of eternal life is moving beyond the small boundaries we have created and deeply reconnect with others around us. In the name of independence and privacy, we draw a boundary between “mine” and “yours,” and we don’t want other people coming into our private territory, nor do we want to intrude into other people’s territories. Our sense of connection with others has been gradually weakening. The more we have lost the sense of connection with other human beings, the more we tend to objectify others or see others as things rather than human beings. Christians are no exception.

I believe you have heard about the Atlanta shootings on Tuesday. I was deeply troubled because this incident was the most aggressive form of hate crime against Asian Americans. The more troubling news is that the gunman grew up in a conservative Baptist church and was an active youth leader. He was isolated within his hard-shell of ego, guilty, and lust. As he was entrapped in himself, he objectified Asian women. He perceived them not as people but as an object of his sexual temptation.

I was also troubled because of how police officers have perceived what happened. Capt. Jay Baker, a spokesperson for the Cherokee County sheriff’s office, said, spa shootings suspect had a “really bad day for him, and this is what he did.” Baker also said, “He apparently has an issue, what he considers a sex addiction, and sees these locations as something that allows him to go to these places, and it’s a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate.” He sounded like the shooter’s defense attorney. His word implies as if victims were the cause of a temptation that the offender wanted to eliminate. He objectified victims. This is an example of the whitewashing of white crime, a Chicago Tribune columnist said.

Atlanta shooting is a “racist,” “misogynist,” and “xenophobic” attack against Asian women in America, but a lot of people don’t see it or don’t want to admit it because they don’t want to face their own white fragility. So many people just wanted to keep their ego and feeling good about themselves. They try to remain in the small space inside of a hard shell of ego. However, protecting my own ego or feeling good about myself is not a way of salvation.

God creates human beings to be interdependent beings. We do not exist alone. Because we all are interconnected to one another, we all are responsible for injustice in the world. We need to break the hard shell of our ego and restore a sense of connection with others. The only way to break through it is self-denial. When a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies... the hard shell of the grain gradually decomposes and lets the energy of life inside the shell begin to flow and bear new life.

Imagine what would happen if we all have a strong sense of connection with all human being just like we have for our family. There would be no place for hate, no room for discrimination, no room for hunger and poverty, no place for inequality and injustice. No place for war. There would be life, joy, friendship, reconciliation, peace, justice, faith, hope, and love! All of these beautiful things can happen when a seed falls into the earth and dies.

The season of Lent is a time to break this hard shell of ego. It is time to break the world of our own making and re-connect to the true source of life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Only through self-denial are we able to keep our lives forever. It is not easy. But remember that Jesus Christ

does not stand outside waiting for us to break our own shells. Rather, Christ first broke the boundaries between God and the world and came into our lives. The time has come. Break the shell and follow the lead of our Christ.