



Sermon Growth Guide

February 21, 2021

To Give His Life – A Funeral Procession

John 12:12–25

Key Verse: John 12:24

“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.”

Big Idea: If you want your life to amount to something eternally meaningful, release it into the soil at the foot of the cross.

Foundations

This week we begin our new sermon series, **To Give His Life**. What is love? John writes, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Jesus loving us means Jesus giving Himself away for us. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” (Romans 5:8).

“Jesus came to earth for one primary reason,” writes Pastor Tim, “to give His life away as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Christ’s single act of love on the cross makes all the difference. Calvary offers us our only chance to let go of our sin and hold onto life eternal in Christ. However, letting go of our sin is not easy. We must release control of our lives.

Pastor Tim asks, “Can you look at your own life and toss it in the soil before Jesus? Fully release and drop it into the soil at the foot of the cross? That’s the question Jesus is asking.”

Gathered together with your circle, open your time of study in prayer. Ask the Spirit to guide and guard your spiritual formation, your growth in Christ. Pray to be given the courage to place your life with Jesus in the crimson soil of Golgotha hill.

Understanding God’s Word

What passages from the Old Testament are quoted in our text today? Why is the Old Testament being brought into the events of John 12:12–25?

According to the Pharisees in verse 19, how popular has Jesus become?

Spend time discussing verses 23–25. What does the kernel of wheat metaphor mean?

Applying God’s Word

Pastor Tim asks, “Can you look at your own life and toss it in the soil before Jesus? Fully release and drop it into the soil at the foot of the cross? That’s the question Jesus is asking.” How are you doing at letting go of your life that Christ might use your life to advance His Kingdom through you? Encourage, spur and pray for one another—that we as the First Pres family be joyfully willing to give up our lives for the sake of Jesus living through us.

Witnessing God’s Word

Identify and name one person you want to see come to love Jesus. Commit to strive to have Jesus live through you toward this person by fully placing your life with Jesus on the cross.

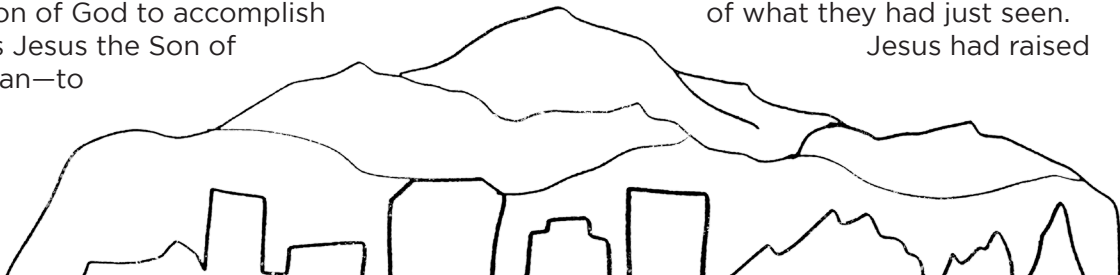
New Orleans was quiet and cold this week. Quiet for COVID and cold because, whew, it was cold down there! Usually the parades and music go on and on. I've never been, but have you seen those funeral processions they hold in New Orleans? Trumpets and trombones marching along. That's the way to do it! It's almost hard to tell, is this a funeral or a parade? We're in Palm Sunday today. The real Palm Sunday isn't until the end of March, but our passage today is the Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem and began His Passion Week, His week of suffering. I'm tired of rushing through that week in two Sundays. The Gospels spend almost a third of their total chapters just on this last week of Jesus' life. So, I thought we would stretch it out a little and go a little deeper this year into the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. His final week. It began with this parade we know so well on Palm Sunday. But was it a parade? Jesus knew, it wasn't a parade; it was a funeral procession.

Jesus came to earth for one primary reason, to give His life away as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. John would later write to the churches, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16). It is how we know what love is. Jesus laid down his life for us. "What is love?" "Jesus laid down His life for me." Can you even connect question and answer? I want us to. I want us to get into the heart of Jesus. Every engagement Jesus had in all His life, every ministry moment, every conversation, every promise, every miraculous event or holy healing, every one of them was connected in Jesus' mind to the very act that was necessary to make all of them happen, the very act that was necessary to restore fallen humanity to a holy God, the very act that was necessary for Jesus the Son of God to accomplish as Jesus the Son of Man—to

accomplish in human flesh—to die for sin on the cross. In the back of Jesus' mind was always this truth: He came to give His life. John in his letter again: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). I know what love is when I understand that Jesus came to give His life. He knew it that day when everyone sang and shouted and celebrated and welcomed Him to Jerusalem. Everybody there saw a parade, but Jesus saw something else.

If you've been around, you've heard about Palm Sunday. That's the day kids get handed little green branches of leaves to whip each other with all morning! How fun. All four Gospels tell the story. Jesus resolved to enter Jerusalem. He was coming with all the others to celebrate Passover, one of the highest festivals of the year. The city of Jerusalem would swell 10 times its size to celebrate, some said to two million. Jesus joins the crowd but takes a seat on a young donkey. Prophecy said the Messiah would come that way, humble, not a conquering hero, but humbly, on a donkey. The people had seen enough of Jesus' miracles and ministry to have hope. They started chanting from Psalm 118, a passage about the coming Messiah. "Hosanna! God save us now! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" God's anointed. Messiah. In Greek: Christos. Throw your cloaks and branches down before Him. If the people didn't shout, the stones would take up the job. Messiah is here, entering the East Gate. Palm Sunday. You probably know this story, so let's go down to the next layer.

In the background of the main scene another layer of action was playing out. There was the main crowd there for Passover, but there was also a second crowd—a crowd that was following Jesus around because of what they had just seen. Jesus had raised



Lazarus up from the dead in nearby Bethany. “Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him” (John 12:17–18). They wanted to see what Jesus would do next. Could this be the Messiah? In that group were also the religious elite, the Pharisees, who were eaten up with jealousy at the rising influence of Jesus and irritated with His teaching. It sounded heretical to them. From the moment Jesus raised Lazarus, it says in chapter 11 of John, they plotted to take His life. “So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!’” (John 12:19).

Then something else happened. “Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus” (John 12:20–22). So what? Why are they so excited? This is also a sign of the Messiah. This is a testament to Jesus. God is up to something in Jesus. It goes all the way back to Genesis 12 when God told Abraham He would make a great nation of his descendants, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). The prophets were watching and waiting for it. Isaiah said, “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:3). Foreign nations approaching Jesus for blessing. This moment is as big as the donkey ride through the gate, you see? Philip tells Andrew. Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. It’s happening. It’s here. The nations are coming in to be blessed by us. We’re going viral! This ministry is going global! This is it!

“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life’” (John 12:23–25). It’s time to be glorified, Jesus says. Time for glory. What does that mean? It’s not viral expansion, global success in the way the disciples see success. Jesus means it is time to give His life. He is only five days away from the cross. It’s not a parade; it’s a funeral procession.

There is a part in great movies or binge-worthy series when the hero sacrifices themselves to save everybody else. Before you notice, she has turned back to face the enemy forces all alone. Certain death, just to give everybody else enough time to escape. Before you realize what’s going on, she has closed the door to the escape pod and launched it, but she stayed on the ship! The camera floats away with the hero looking out the glass. Saved everybody else, by giving her life. You know? And what happens in that moment? Your heart goes out to them. Your heart breaks for them. You love them, deeply. What a character! I want you to see that character in Jesus. I want you to feel that love for Jesus. At every turn, Jesus knew what was coming. Jesus had that look in His eye all along. I know what it costs to make this happen. I know what I must do to keep this promise. I know what it takes to save your life. “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” (John 12:24).

A friend of mine came to Christ in his 30s. He had a very successful career going in medical equipment marketing and sales all up and down the East Coast, but his marriage fell apart and

it was his fault. He met Jesus then. But he was a very driven, very ambitious, very controlling kind of guy so here's what he did. He thought, "Great! Now I have something worthwhile to drive my life toward. I was driving my life toward money and success and women. Now I'll drive my life toward God and Jesus and faith. Got it!" But there was no freedom, no relief, no life in it really, just a renewed ambition to succeed in a different way. To be successfully religious. He even found his old habits creeping up on him again. It took some time for the truth of this Scripture to settle in. He had to die. He had to die to himself. Not drive himself toward Jesus instead of driving himself toward money. He had to die to himself. Like a seed, he had to go down into the earth and die—and trust his rising again fully into the hands of Jesus. That level of faith and submission led him to give up his former life, even his former career. Now he is a Christian counselor and author, leading hundreds of people into newfound freedom and health in Jesus Christ.

That's what it is to come to Christ. You give Him your entire life with trust and faith. You say, "I'm dead to myself. I go to the cross with this old life. And if I am to rise again, well, that's in Jesus' hands. But I trust Him to bring me up into new life." "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). You are just a seed, just one seed. In your own hands, that's where it ends. As long as you keep that, hold onto that, grip that little seed of your life so tight... As long as you expect to squeeze life out of that little seed and you hoard it and clinch onto it, well, it's nothing. But if you will toss it into the soil... Jesus uses that word "hate." It isn't that you are supposed to hate life. He's not talking about negative feelings toward your own life or the world or anything. Jesus means despise, as in to turn your eyes away from, to think less of. Enough to toss it. Can you look at your own life and toss it in the soil before Jesus? Fully release and drop

it into the soil at the foot of the cross? That's the question Jesus is asking. Remain a single seed, or become a field of harvest? It isn't about joining the parade. It's about giving your life away. Give your life to Jesus and trust Him to raise it up again.

When Jesus said these things, He knew exactly what He was talking about. The disciples did not. Remember, "At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him" (John 12:16). Only after Jesus was glorified. Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). Isn't He being glorified? Listen to the shouts and the songs. Look at the hands waving in the air and the palm branches. See the cloaks and blankets lining the street as He rides a donkey through the gate into Jerusalem! That's glory! No, says Jesus. This isn't the glory. The glory is when I do what I have come to do. The glory is when I take all the sins of all the world on my shoulders, accept the unjust sentence of murderous powers, lie down on my back on a cross of wood while Roman soldiers drive in the nails, and get lifted up to die. That's the glory. That's the fulfillment. Because then, you will see, just wait; then death will die and new life will come and all things will begin to be made new. And you can follow along. That's glory. Not a parade. A funeral procession. But this funeral procession ends at an empty grave.

