

First, let me give you an update on my dog, Keen. He had his surgery about 10 days ago and is getting better every day. He is now a three-legged dog, and he looked so pitiful when I first picked him up. But he is getting stronger day by day and we can now go on 3 or 4 minute walks. I've been calling him "Hop along Keen." He's still not fit enough to show you. But soon you'll see him again.

I have a new understanding of life with my dog now. It was kind of a little Epiphany for me. Rather than focus on how unfair life is and how awful it will be when my dog, Keen, is ultimately taken from me, I'm coming to a new understanding. God has loaned him to me for a while and at some point God will want him back. Keen isn't mine to own like a book or a piece of furniture. He's a living being with a heart and soul and he belongs to God, not me. The people and loving creatures that God puts in our lives come and go. They are not ours to keep forever. We love them like crazy when they are with us. And we know that they will return to their Maker, some sooner than others.

And that leads me right into the theme of my sermon today based on our reading from the Gospel of John. We come from and go back to God. Jesus did not just come and go. He was here and is here as our Christ from before time and forever. We Christians believe in the Holy Trinity of God. God is Creator. God is Jesus Christ, our redeemer. God is Spirit who sustains us and fills us with life and inspiration.

That's why, in John's Gospel, the opening chapter doesn't speak of the baptism of Jesus or the birth of Jesus, but the ever-present, ever glorified, everlasting Word of God, the Christ who came into the world as a human and God glorified him. God exalted Jesus before his earthly life, during his walk with us, and after his resurrection and ascension.

So that is why even Greeks came looking for Jesus, as we heard in our passage today. Jews and gentiles alike, who had the eyes and ears of faith could see and hear and know that Jesus was God's son. They had heard from others about who he was and what he did. They knew that people had learned from him, had found healing and peace through him. So, they wanted to witness the power of Jesus for themselves. So, the Greeks found the disciples and said, "We want to see Jesus."

Jesus spoke to them, and probably a large crowd, and told them that things were about to change. Those Greeks may have wanted to see the power of Jesus. But he told them that he would not be able to stay in the world forever. He was a grain of wheat that had to die in order to bear much fruit. He was the light that had to be lifted up so that everyone could see God through His light. Jesus had to lose his earthly life in order to show us eternal life. That may not have been what the Greeks wanted to hear.

The Greeks, the disciples, and we must understand and accept that the death of Jesus would lead to his resurrection. He had to leave his friends and followers in order for God to glorify him again, and make him the Christ for all people. In John's Gospel remember that it will be Mary Magdalene who comes to the tomb and Jesus becomes present to her. And he tells her, Do not hold onto me. (John 20:17) Jesus was not staying long.

We can't hang onto the person of Jesus. But Christ's presence has been, is and will be ever on-going.

Not true of humans. We cling to earthly life and don't want to lose whatever we have gained over our years. We have a hard time letting go. When studying for this sermon I came across a poem written by Percy Shelley in 1818. It's called Ozymandias (which is another name for the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ramesses II.)

The theme of the poem is one that resonated with Shelley's audience in the 1800s and does so with us as well. A large statue to this King was raised up at his death, but over time the statue was broken and laying in pieces in the sand of the desert. The inscription on the pedestal reads "I am Ozymandias. King of Kings. Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair."ⁱ He wanted to be sure that the world knew that there was no one like him in power, in prestige, in accomplishments.

But there's nothing left of Ozymandias. There's nothing much left of his statue either. He thought that his legacy and greatness would live forever. In one way it does. Part of the sculpture now resides in the British Museum. But it's just a hunk of stone; very old stone to be sure. But where are the mighty works and power of the man now?

He was proud and strong. And he is gone, and for the most part forgotten. That was the point of Shelley's poem. We don't live forever and neither does our influence over others. Incidentally, *Breaking Bad* fans might remember that one of the episodes of that series was called Ozymandias and the actor, Bryan Cranston, recites Shelley's poem.

A popular expression we sometimes hear is in this regard is, "O how the mighty have fallen". That phrase originally comes from the Second Book of Samuel (1:25) in speaking about the death of King Saul and his son Jonathan. We use it in much the same way that Shelley spoke of that ancient King of Egypt.

Human things don't last. Power and prestige don't last. But our life with Christ does last. And what we do with the life we have, while we have it, is the challenge that God's Spirit sets before us. This year, the **world** has put a pandemic in front of us. And the Spirit of God has taught us that in order to live a fulfilled and graceful life we must accept and adapt.

The pandemic was not going to ever adapt itself to our ways, that's for sure. To the extent that we are able, and with as much faith as we can muster, we must lose our life in service to God and others. Through this we will have the life to which Jesus has called us. And we will have eternal life at the end of our earthly days.

As we prayed together in our collect this morning (for the 5th Sunday of Lent):

"...among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found through Jesus Christ our Lord. "

ⁱ Ozymandias, Wikipedia.