

want to be married to someone who was blind and she left him.

He had a sister who lived with him and provided for him. When he was preparing sermons she would read to him the passages of the Bible, and he would then memorize the words so that he could proclaim them on Sunday.

All was fine until his sister fell in love and got engaged. She told George “I’m going to have to leave you because I have a husband now.” On the night that his sister was to be married George sat alone in his home, not sure how he was going to manage. He was hopeless. He was in despair.

He sat down and began to write a hymn. In his diary, George Matheson remembered, “It was composed with extreme rapidity; it seemed to me that its construction occupied only a few minutes, and I felt myself rather in the position of one who was being dictated to than of an original artist. I was suffering from extreme mental distress, and the hymn was the fruit of my pain.”

Matheson wrote these verses:  
O love that will not let me go  
I rest my weary soul in thee  
I give thee back the life I owe  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be

O Light that follows all my way,  
I yield my flick’ring torch to thee.  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
that in thy sunshine’s blaze its day  
may brighter, fairer be.

O cross that liftest up my head  
I dare not ask to fly from thee  
I lay in dust life’s glory dead  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be

I think Matheson got close to understanding what Jesus is really saying here this morning. It is in losing our lives (with all

our marvelously crafted plans and ideas about ourselves) that we truly come to rely on the one who is life himself.

This week we will walk with Jesus through the events of a week that changed everything. But not in a general sense. But it changed everything for you and for me.

Jesus took all of my sin and your sin, my sorrow and your sorrow and my pain and your pain and buried it dead in a tomb.

And when we see these events with the eyes of faith, we do not simply see a tragedy and the sins of the world winning the day, but we see the remarkable and breathtaking act of God who is determined to draw all people to himself – no matter the cost – for his glory.

We see how it has all led to this. We see how the light shone into a dark world for just a short time so that we might see our way to finding Jesus – our hope and our guide in life and in death.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

***“What Hour Is It?”***  
*March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 — Selby United Church – Scripture: John 12:20-36*  
*By Rev. Mike Putnam*

It was in 2008 when a Scottish woman named Susan Boyle stood before a live studio audience on the show Britain’s Got Talent.

She walked on to the stage for the first time an awkward looking, unemployed, unmarried 47-year-old. In her initial interview she had spoken at length about her cat named Pebbles.

When she walked on stage and began to speak one of the judges, Simon Cowell, rolled his eyes. The audience laughed and mocked her.

But then she began to sing. Mouths dropped. A hush overtook the auditorium.

As she sang some were so moved that they actually stood and began to applaud. Others began to shed tears in utter amazement. When she concluded another judge, Pearce Morgan said that without a doubt that was the biggest surprise he’d ever seen on the show. He said that when she walked in everyone was laughing at her, but nobody is laughing now.

Sixteen years later and Susan Boyle has sold more than 25-Million records.

This morning Jesus has taken the crowd by surprise. They weren’t there to see him. They were there for a traditional Jewish festival – The Passover. It was the usual thing. People made the sometimes-long journey to Jerusalem to reconnect with family and friends, they’d make their trip to the temple to do their annual sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, and they’d have their annual dinner with lamb and all the fixin’s!

But what no one expected was for Jesus to steal the show. What no one thought would happen is that Jesus would show up and suddenly Passover would seem like a second-rate holiday. Because when Jesus arrived in

Jerusalem the crowds surprised even themselves. This unassuming carpenter from backwoods Nazareth – riding a donkey of all things – being followed by his disciples, an unimpressive band of local-yocals suddenly captured the hearts of those who were there for something else.

And what happened next? Well, not much actually. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus went to the temple. But John recalls a little incident that seems even less important. It’s all kind of anticlimactic at this point. But in this little incident Jesus reveals what’s really going on and so, as we head into this Holy Week, Jesus’ words are worth considering.

Because in this great Passover crowd are some Greek believers. They’ve come a long way. They have not been privy to the works of Jesus over the last few years – this is probably the first they are hearing of him. But like everyone else, they get caught up in the moment.

And so, it’s natural that they want to know more. “We would like to see Jesus” they say. We want to meet this guy! We want to understand whatever it is that just happened back there at the city gate.

But this is not a request locked in first-century Palestine. There are some today who might say, “I too want to meet this guy.” I’ve heard of him, my grandmother was so taken with him, my brief Sunday school days (a little fuzzy at this point) taught me some nice things about him. I’d like to meet him. There are some today who’s the longing of their hearts is to meet Jesus.

The interesting thing is that the people who are asking to see Jesus were already religious people. They had faith in the One God, they had rituals and practices of their own, they know the scriptures and

understand God's law. But there was still a longing for something more... They're looking for an encounter.

But Jesus' response to these seekers is surprising. It seems like he's not responding appropriately to their request. Just give them a meet and greet. But no, he gives them a kind of off the wall speech. It's weird. I feel like he's not giving them what they want. Maybe a little Q&A would be better, Jesus. They've come a long way...just give them some encouraging words!

But Jesus tells these seekers, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The title, the "Son of Man" is used by Jesus some 80 times in the New Testament. But it originates in the Old Testament, in Daniel chapter 7. It's rare in the Old Testament, but it seems to be Jesus' favorite title for himself. Maybe he likes it because it's kind of obscure – it's a term without political undertones. The term "Messiah" was loaded with expectations – but "Son of Man" just kind of made people wonder.

And what is this comment about "his hour?" You remember way back near the beginning of the Gospel of John when Jesus' mother asks him to help with the shortage of wine at the wedding banquet and Jesus says, "Woman my hour has not yet come." Well, now Jesus is announcing that the hour is here. But the hour for what?

Whatever it is that Jesus is all about is about to happen. For years Jesus has wandered the highways and the byways teaching and preaching. And it seemed to many that Jesus had some good moral lessons about being nice and living well. And he does, to be sure. But make no mistake, that's not why he's come. His hour is why he is here. Jesus has come to die.

You know, a third of the gospels detail what is that is about to happen over the next seven days. Whatever it is that is about to happen is the main event.

To clarify Jesus tells them a mini

parable. He says, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls in the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed."

Well, that's a bit of a downer. I mean just a few minutes ago everyone was shouting and cheering and there was this whole exciting entry into the city. We thought something was really great was about to happen. And now we're talking about seeds dying?

But not just any seed and not just any death. The kernel of wheat is a parable about the fruitfulness of Jesus' death in particular.

And yet, Jesus' death also has implications for us who desire to follow him. "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Well, there's a cheery little message to print on your favorite coffee mug at home! But Jesus is saying that you can't truly live until you come to terms with your own sin, your own neediness, your own death. Live clutching life trying to squeeze the most out of it, trying to check off your own bucket list, trying to beat the clock and you will never truly live.

Jesus wants us to live a different way. Live as if life is not short at all, live as if you have so much of it, live as if time is no problem. Because since Jesus faced his hour, we live wastefully in love. We are so rich in life that it only makes sense to live sacrificing and serving and working for the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated with his hour.

But that's a very different way of understanding our lives, isn't it? That's not what our culture wants us to believe about life. We're taught that life is short, and we've got to make something of ourselves. We've got to go after our own happiness. We've got to live our best lives now. But that way of living makes us selfish, and it makes our lives small.

But no, Jesus says you must also die.

He says, we must die so that His life might flow through us. Because so long as you are trying to build your own life, be your own person, maximize your own happiness and minimize your own pain, be your own saviour, and you will live a small and withered life. But there is so much more for you. But you can't do it for yourself. You need to put your life into the hands of him to died and rose again.

And then, as if this little speech wasn't hard enough to comprehend, the voice of God comes out of nowhere. We've seen this before. Remember Jesus' baptism? – "This is my son with whom I am well pleased." But today God is affirming not Jesus, but his own glory. Jesus says, "Father glorify your name" and the Father responds, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." In other words, what is about to happen is for the glory of God. And what does the glory of God look like?

Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself". What is going to happen at the cross? Some say nothing is happening, it's just a human tragedy. Some say Jesus is showing us the love of God – that he is willing to bear our most terrible side of humanity because he loves us so. But that's not what Jesus says. Jesus says that something efficacious is happening in his agony. Jesus says that something is changing for us through his suffering.

He says, "Now is the time for judgement on this world." Yikes. That sounds kind of scary! But doesn't John 3:16 say, "I have not come to condemn the world?" So this judgement will not end in condemnation.

Jesus is about to bring the world to judgement and through that judgement he is going to draw all people to himself. Because there's no other way to pass through the judgment of God without the work of Jesus Christ on your soul. No one will pass. No one can live up to that standard. We need a saviour!

John 3:16 is the key. "For God so

loved the world that he gave his only and begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

See, whatever is about to happen here this week is the fulfillment of whatever that means. Jesus is saving the world. Jesus is the answer to God's love for the world and judgement on the world. Jesus is the only possible way to hold both together at the same time.

But now Jesus says to these Greeks, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."

I come back to that line when Jesus tells Thomas that he is going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house. And Thomas says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

It puts a different spin on what life is ultimately about, doesn't it? We're going somewhere. It's not about checking off your bucket list and living your best life. That's living in the dark. It's about following the one who knows the way to our destination.

"Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going." I don't know where I'm going, do you? None of us do...unless we are following the one who knows the way.

But what does this mean? How does all of this come together into a way of living now?

George Matheson was born in Glasgow in 1842. He started to lose his eyesight in his youth. He graduated from seminary when he was 20 and he had a fiancé. But his eyesight continued to deteriorate, and he became blind. His fiancé decided she didn't