

Most of life is pretty predictable isn't it?
You rise, for something, work, retirement, the duties of raising children.
Make the coffee, unload the dishwasher, walk the dog.
Three times a day, you are hungry.
At least once every 24 hours, you go to bed.
Sometimes dramatic events far away change things; occasionally it snows or a hurricane blows up this way, and yet we are pretty quickly back to normal.
Christmas and Easter and a blessed vacation anchor the year and come around, again and again.
But every once in a while, there is a dramatic appearance or departure that makes everything different.
A death, a birth, the retirement of your boss and the arrival of someone young and ambitious, any of these may change everything for you,
As all those old routines are changed by some dramatic appearance.

The arrival of "some Greeks," caused a change the attitude and teaching of Jesus, as the evangelist John remembered it.
These Greeks are mysterious, but it seems that they were proselytes, seekers of the God and ways of Israel.
They had come to worship at the festival, so they were not disciples of Zeus and Athena, at least.
The evangelist gives us, the reader, a fairly elaborate set up to Jesus' response to them.
They spoke to Philip, and he to Andrew, and then the two of them went to Jesus.
Perhaps we are supposed to sense that this was a portentous visit, an arrival that will change things.
That's why Philip told Andrew, before Jesus.
And indeed Jesus responded with a dramatic announcement:
The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified.
At least three times before, in this Gospel, we have heard that his hour or "my hour" has not yet come.
But the arrival of the Greeks signaled that the hour had come.
The world had noticed Jesus, had come near, and the drama of his saving death was now triggered.
This might be the last straw from those opposed to him.
That people from far away, people on the verge of joining up with Israel were taking an interest in him; that might have been too much.
Maybe the Lord knew these people were harbingers of the final attack on him.
The Greeks led Jesus to proclaim that now his hour had come.

And he began to speak in pretty amazing terms about what the hour would mean.

This hour presented vast spiritual opportunity for all who would claim it. Jesus spoke in broad terms of those who could join themselves to him. He speaks of:

Those who hate their lives

Whoever serves me

And of *all people* being drawn to himself

The key to joining him isn't ethnicity; he is not just for Greeks, not just for Jews

The key is serving him, in a form of life that opens up ever deeper avenues of love.

It is not an easy road he speaks of here; death is the ready metaphor for this form of life.

When a grain of wheat falls in the earth, when it is destroyed as the life within expands and destroys the seed, much fruit is borne.

So too those who love the Lord are led to lose their lives for his sake

But gain an eternal life in return.

Greeks could do it, Jews could do it; Persians; Americans.

Whoever serves him can become part of that great group, of all people drawn to himself.

There is an tempting universalism our ears may hear in this.

All people...whoever...all those...

Big wide terms that sound good to generous, ecumenical Christian people.

How much I want all people to be drawn into the fullness of the Kingdom.

And yet the church has always resisted an easy universalism, one that leaves us with little sense of the unique call to life in Christ.

If these Greeks led Jesus to throw wide open the door to life in him, he nonetheless described a challenging path and one that remains centered on him.

This passage might tell us that the doors are wide open to a narrow way.

A way of ever-deeper discipleship,

more intentional focus on Jesus and his kingdom,

ever greater hope for his purposes to be played out in our lives, churches, and community.

That might be the hope we have for our hope to keep a holy Lent each year.

That you who follow its discipline are seeking a higher level of discipleship,

A closer walk with the Lord,

A deeper and more connected Christian community.

Perhaps any of us, growing in Christ and his ways, might have the provocative power of the Greeks who showed up for someone else.

Prompting them to ask if perhaps the hour of their growth in discipleship might not have come.

And Christ might use you to invite others through those wide open doors and down that narrow way,

That leads to the Kingdom.