

- So, in our gospel reading this morning some Greeks arrive on the scene.
- They are Gentile converts to the Jewish faith and they have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Passover.
- And, it appears, they also wish to see Jesus.
- They speak to Philip who speaks to Andrew and then Philip and Andrew go together to tell Jesus.
- It is a story that seems strangely determined to make us aware of this kind of chain of communication from the Greeks to Philip to Andrew to Jesus.
- And perhaps the story seems all the more strange because when word of the Greek's desire to meet Jesus finally gets to Jesus, Jesus seems to go off on this kind of tangential monologue about the hour having come for him to be glorified.
- And we never actually know whether those Greeks get to finally meet Jesus!

- But the details of this story, strange though they may seem, actually draw our attention to an earlier story in John's Gospel.
- This story, today, is an echo of that earlier story, and we are meant to hear the two of them together.

- So what was that earlier story?

- Well, right back in chapter one of John's Gospel we hear the story of a similar chain of communication.
- Jesus encounters Philip and says to him,
 - "Follow me"
- Then Philip finds Nathanael and invites him to come and see Jesus.
- And then Jesus greets Nathanael and Nathanael recognises him as the King of Israel.

- That story is a story of call and it is also a story of recognition.
 - Philip and Nathanael are both called to follow Jesus.
 - And then Nathanael's words to Jesus are a recognition that he is the Messiah,
 - the one who has come to save and redeem Israel.

- This morning's story is also a story of call and recognition.
 - Those Greeks have experienced a call to encounter and follow Jesus.
 - And we who are listening are meant to recognise from this that Jesus comes not only to save and redeem Israel but to bring salvation and healing to the whole world - Jew and non-Jew alike.

- Now, maybe that is not news to us, but it is still good news.

- Maybe, actually, it is an article of faith for us, something we take for granted, that Jesus came to save the whole world.
- But actually the recognition of this truth still has the power to blow our minds.
- Often in our prayers of intercession we make a point of praying for both the people we love and the people we struggle to love.
- We do this because we are mindful of Jesus' call to pray for our enemies and to bless those who persecute us.
- Now maybe we might have a hard time actually naming someone as an enemy, but I think it would be fair to say that all of us have had encounters with others that have brought home to us just how radically different people's ways of being in the world can be.
- There may be people who we fear or who we are suspicious of.
- Certainly there are people whose views and opinions about politics, the economy, social justice and issues of identity are radically different, and indeed, counter to my own.
- And sometimes I have a hard time, maybe you do too, believing that people can actually think and believe the way that they do!
- And just as an aside, that's partly why I decided to do some courses in the States on mediation and reconciliation as part of my sabbatical in May.
- But the point I want to make is that, in Jesus, God comes to bring salvation and healing to the whole world.
- Not just to me and you and all the people like me and you, all the people who look like us, vote like us, behave like us etc, and to be fair we are actually a pretty diverse bunch ourselves, but I think you get the point.
- God's desire to save the whole world, not just you and me and all the other people like you and me, but all the people who think and act in ways that might seem weird and wacky and downright dangerous or threatening to us...
- God's desire to save the world springs from God's love for the world and all its people and creatures.
- God loves everyone and not just regardless of how different they may be from me and you.
- God loves everyone, period.
- God loves everyone with a deep and abiding love that has nothing to do with the criteria by which we might judge a person likeable or loveable.
- God loves everyone because we are all God's children, the work of God's hands, the delight of God's heart, if we can use such anthropomorphic language!
- And that recognition actually requires something of us.
- And what it requires of us is death, or a kind of death, at least.

- And that's what brings me to a second echo that is present in Jesus' words this morning.
- In our gospel reading, Jesus says,
 - "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"
- This is the second time in this season of Lent that we have heard Jesus speak of losing one's life in order to save it.
- And the life we are being called to lose, the death that we are being called to die, is the giving up of our sense of ourselves as the centre of the universe.
- It is the giving up of the belief, implicit or explicit, that our lives and our experiences and our ideas about the world are somehow the standard by which everything and everyone else is to be judged as normal or abnormal, conforming or deviant, sensible or weird.
- This giving up is the recognition that we, whether as individuals, or as a community or as a nation or as an ethnic group, or as a congregation, or whatever, do not have any preeminence in the eyes of God.
- We are God's children, the work of God's hands, the delight of God's hearts.
- But so too is everyone.
- And this actually calls us into a particular way of being in the world,
 - a way that is shaped by openness and curiosity regarding the possibility of what we might learn from one another about one another and about the God who loves us all,
 - a way that is shaped by a sense of wonder at the extraordinary diversity of God's creation and at the depth of God's passion for us.
 - a way that calls us into the practices of forgiveness and reconciliation as we seek to work out our differences and discover God's purpose in our relationships with all of God's children.
- This is the life we are called to live and the life that we are called to die for so that all people can experience the wonder and depth of God's love for them.