

Sermon by Vicar Tamika Jancewicz
Sunday, March 18, 2018
5 Lent
John 12:20-33
“Lift Him Up”

After the song: It's amazing how much one quote in scripture can bring back so many memories. I remember this hymn so vividly in my mind after reading today's passage. It's actually been stuck in my head since Wednesday, and hasn't left. “Lift Him Up” is an old hymn written in 1903 by a Pr. John Oatman, and it is one of those songs that would be sung for at least 5 minutes in the church of my youth, and we'd sing the refrain over and over, reminding ourselves that Jesus' promise to draw all “people” to him is absolutely real, and to believe that means we are called to be the example in the world. The verse I just sang says “Oh! The world is hungry for the Living Bread, Lift the savior up for them to see; Trust him, and do not doubt the Words that he said, ‘I'll draw all men unto me.’”

For years I sang this song in church, clapping, swaying, stomping, and believing this call to lift Jesus up. In fact, I just saw my mom yesterday and started singing the song to her, and she joined in with me.

And while there is so much to unpack in today's gospel reading of John, it's that part that Jesus says at the very end that has me humming this tune and wondering where exactly is Jesus being lifted up. This question is not always easy to get an outright answer to, but it's a worthwhile question during our last full week of lent.

This is the central turning point in John's gospel because up until now, Jesus speaks of the hour of his death as yet to come, but here in this verse, it has come. It's almost time for his lifting up on that cross. And with the Greeks seeking to see him, we see that it is indeed for the whole world. They recognize it too.

So when God speaks, and not everyone understands or clearly hears the voice, Jesus is saying...ok, there's still more chances for y'all to get it. When I am lifted up from the earth, I'll draw more people to me. More will see what I came here to do. And he is lifted up. First on the cross, second, during his resurrection, and a third time he is lifted up into the heavens. And now where is he being lifted. Because certainly, he's still is lifted up for us to see.

Perhaps we see Jesus lifted up when students walked out of their classrooms all across LA, walking the streets for justice and policy changes for the right to feel safe, protected, and recognized as worthy of a good and whole education. Hundreds walked out of their schools unafraid of consequences that might come their way, because standing up for their rights was important and rejecting the way things were in this world meant a more abundant life. Many watched from afar as the “East L.A. Walkouts” first happened about fifty years ago in March. And the movement gained momentum after that initial walkout, where up to 10,000 Mexican American students walked out of their classrooms and

marched the streets demanding better schools conditions, fair treatment, and human dignity.

And then we maybe see Jesus is lifted up when again in 2006 of this same month, when thousands of students walked out of their schools protesting an immigration law passed the year before. Because they feared deportation, and the deportation of their loved one. And what is more important staying in school or standing up and rejecting something that affects your life and/or the life of your fellow students? Sounds eerily familiar, right?

And how then do we see what just happened this past Wednesday, where students from more than 2,000 schools across our country walked out of classrooms and school buildings crying out that enough is enough and demanding that something be done about the unsafe environment in places where they just want to go to learn. Signs calling for gun control. Our youth, our children calling for These kids ain't playing, y'all.

And this is not the first go round.

Do you see Jesus being lifted up, drawing us closer to him, drawing the world closer? Can you see that when he is lifted up it keeps looking profoundly hopeful, harder, scary, and uncertain all at the same time.

Where is Jesus pointing us to look and see this ever present gospel of hope despite our brokenness, violence, oppressions, sins of this world? And how are we responding?

I'd like to offer this song one more time. This time the last verse...

How ought a Christian be in times such as these? Silent? Doesn't seem quite fitting. Or are we lifting up the name of Jesus when it's clear we could all use a lot more of his liberating, life giving love? Cuz Jesus *is* there and as we continue our prayerful reflections during lent into our celebratory march on Palm Sunday, let us continue to see Jesus, seeking the path that leads us to a real and present reality of his being lifted up on a cross. A cross no man should ever bear, but he did just the same. And may we point there first, before we see him lifted up in his bodily resurrection and then later ascending into heaven. Not because it hasn't happened, but because there's still real pain in the world. Because he's not done drawing us closer to him. Lift him up. Still he speaks from eternity...speaking life to our death, and our destruction. Still he speaks from eternity...telling us to march, stand up with him, don't give up. Still he speaks from eternity...shouting as he walks out of classrooms, and hallways, telling us that we don't actually have to live this way.

So lift him up...