

John 12:20-33

Preceding this week's gospel text is the stunning miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Yet as amazing as Jesus' ability to bring Lazarus back to life was, for John that event is simply an introduction to the real heart and power of the gospel. The climax of the Lazarus drama does not come when the bound figure stumbles out of the tomb. The crux of that story is here in chapter 12, where the true miracle yet to come is disclosed and the scope of Jesus' mission is revealed. Ironically, it is in bringing Lazarus back to life that the wheels are set in motion for Jesus' own death.

John moves quickly to the heart of this scene, for his focus is not on the seekers, but on the one they seek. Before Jew and Gentile alike, Jesus now proclaims that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v. 23). But this "glorification" has nothing to do with becoming an admired teacher and healer among Gentiles as well as Jews. Jesus' next words are, in fact, shockingly distant from "glorification" — for he immediately begins to speak about his own death.

Jesus speaks about both his own destiny and that of his disciples in the three declarations of verses 24-26. To "bear fruit" is, first, Jesus' own mission, but it becomes the mission of each new disciple as well. Losing his own life in order to be lifted up (as we will see in v. 32) and attain eternal life is part of the Son of Man's glorification. But eternal life does not come sequentially after death. Eternal life is the life promised now to all who become disciples of this glorified one. Eternal life is primarily a qualitative, not a quantitative, concept. Finally, in verse 26, Jesus makes it clear that all those who call themselves his servants share in this eternal life by remaining always in his presence.