

Lent 5 B
John 12:20-33
March 18th, 2018
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

The Hour of Power

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-"Father, save me from this hour?"
No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."

What reason?

Have you never began a day with a similar prayer? I know I have..."Father, save me from this hour!" On those days I want to just pull the covers over my head and just go back to sleep.

They are usually days of "facing the music," that is, the consequences of decisions I have made, things I have done or not done. Prayer seems especially appropriate and relevant at these times, even if it is forgotten on the back burner at others. We are humbled, powerless and in need. 'God help me, I can't fix this mess by myself, and I am afraid the train is going to leave the tracks,' and we all know what that means!

Sometimes the help I need is to face my own truth, to face my own responsibility for things that have gone wrong, or that I purposefully did wrong, knowing what I was doing anyway. My sins are always out there until I decide to own them and ask forgiveness for them. Lent is a unique opportunity to do that, yet in every season, acknowledging our sins and asking forgiveness is always appropriate. The point of life is to try to make that unnecessary by avoiding sin altogether. No one is perfect though, so we will continually have a need for forgiveness-all of us-and we will be presented with many "hours" during which facing them means asking for God's help.

Accepting the truth can be freeing, that is because it is a letting go of all the excuses which bind us up and hold us prisoner. Letting go of untruths (even if unspoken and existing in only our own minds) with which we defend ourselves or because our sense of self preservation and self image is triggered, that letting go brings the peace that comes from acceptance that can be a powerful thing. Have faith, release, find peace.

It is easy to create a truth which blinds us to the wider view of things and reality. We create a construct that helps us live with a shortcoming or something we did that is hard to come to terms with. More than making excuses, it is very easy to lay

blame on others for what we have actually done. We create a version of events we believe will exonerate ourselves, or at least down-play our mistakes in order to make them seemingly acceptable in our own minds and to others. And we repeat our version so many times to ourselves and others, that we actually begin to believe the untruth that we have created. The saddest thing about a lie is when we come to believe it ourselves. When we are separated from the truth, we are beyond help and we become prisoners, no slaves to the elaborate construct we have created to hide behind and 'protect' ourselves and our shattered reputations.

Funny thing about the truth is that the truth is hard to hide from others. It always has a way of peeking around corners while we are speaking. Jesus said in another place, 'There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed; nothing hidden that shall not come to light.' [Mark 4:22] and again in Luke 8:17: "For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light." In my experience, these sayings of Jesus are a natural law that always proves true, especially these days with the internet that can so quickly be used to "fact-check" any statements or secrets on smart phones.

The difficult cup from which we fear to drink is not always about sin, but it is often about facing the truth, like going to the doctor to hear the truth about some illness with which we have been struggling. We procrastinate, not wanting to hear the news or the truth, and hoping it will simply go away and get better. Avoiding facing the hour of truth often makes things get worse. Time can be our enemy when it comes to illness. When we finally have the courage to go to the doctor, it is often good to bring someone more objective along with you, so that they are able to hear clearly with and for you what the doctor is trying to tell you. And the hour can be good news because you find help and relief from your worries. And just maybe your news is that your fear was unjustified. The hour is all about placing your life and your faith in God's hands, instead of relying on yourself alone. One is the loneliest number by which to face the hour, no friends and no God.

Or sometimes it is the prayer of the first responder. How many fire fighters and police officers and medics must pray this prayer each morning before they leave for work? And how often is this prayer said in their minds as they travel to an emergency call?

Only they could tell you.

Or sometimes we are called to risk our lives or give our lives to save someone else-loved one or stranger. We pray God would spare us from such an hour or test of our faith. The words of Jesus again echo in my mind: "Greater love hath no one than this, that a person lay down their life for their friends." [John 15.13] These words are all about facing the hour of power. I pray we will have the courage and fortitude to do what is right. He desired to be saved from this hour, and that is only human, for the will for self preservation is strong among animals and human

beings, but Jesus knew that his hour, his time, is why God had come to us to be with us. He knew his hour would make plain God's love for all of us, or so he hoped. "This is why I have come to this hour," Jesus concluded. Jesus was facing the hour of trial and God knew that it would be an excruciating (notice the Latin word cross in the middle of that word) trial to face: terrible, unimaginable physical pain and suffering, humiliation, abandonment and apparent failure at the moment of God's greatest success: dying for us to show us God's love.

When we contemplate giving our lives to save another, now we come close to understanding what Jesus felt like when he prayed this prayer.

Jesus said in another place, that is, in a few days when he is in the garden of Gethsemane, in [Matthew 26:39]:

"And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' Not my will, but yours be done.

Prayer is always helpful. But have I done everything that I can to resolve my problems? Am I at that point yet? Is this truly my hour, or do I have more work to do on myself? Or am I throwing in the towel early and turning to God for help? You can even ask for God's help at this moment to muster the courage and insight to walk with God through the valley of the shadow of sin to the valley of love and peace which lies beyond on the other side of the hill which separates them.

Let go and let God be in charge. God will be with you. Free yourself from fear. Free yourself through faith in the forgiveness of God to loose the chains of sin and denial and the slavery of untruth.

The Good news of Jesus' suffering for us is that forgiveness begins with God. If God can forgive us, perhaps we can forgive ourselves, and by faith, seek the forgiveness of others, especially those we have hurt. This is the hour of power. And the power comes from God. And Lent is an opportunity to engage that hour!

The hour of power is about the power of God, and not the power of our fear or our sins that are held over us. We have the power to turn to God in prayer for help. We have the power to face the hour, and with faith move and live through it. AMEN