

## Closing Service Northern Parish 15.3.2015

### John 12, 20-26

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*20Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” 22Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.*

*23Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me*

Dear congregation,

John in many ways is the “global gospel”. In Chapter one he states that Jesus is God, is the Word through whom the whole creation was created: God said: Let there be - and there was...”

In John 3,16 the statement that God so loved the world does not only refer to the people but to the cosmos: Jesus’ mission is a global one, spanning all of creation and all of times.

For thirty years he has been living as a Jew among Jews, reaching out to the Jewish people. And now it seems as if his mission is exploding. Crowds gather to see Jesus. The Temple authorities are concerned. “Look how the

whole world has gone after him!”

Even Greeks come with the request: We would see Jesus - we would like to meet him! Success at last!

Jesus responds: “The hour has come” The hour of victory? No - the hour to move his mission from local to global. But the road to that is through death! The kernel of wheat has to “die” in the ground in order to be transformed into a new plant that bears much fruit.

The earthly Jesus can only be at one place at a time - the risen one is present every where, all the time.

The earthly Jesus can pronounce to individuals: Your sins are forgiven! The crucified Jesus will bear the punishment for all sins of all mankind to set us free. Through him we can all receive forgiveness.

The earthly Jesus can touch a dead person and raise him from the death. The crucified Lord will be raised from the dead and break the power of death itself, opening the road to eternal life for all who believe in him!

It is wonderful if the crowds gather around Jesus, and even foreigners start taking notice - but that is far too little. Jesus wants to bring salvation not only to those who gather around him, but to the world. It is by far not enough if pilgrims from the world can travel to Jerusalem to have an audience with the Lord for a few minutes. He, saviour of the universe, wants to be with us all the time till the End of the age! Therefore the kernel of wheat has to die in the ground so that it can grow and bear much fruit.

**On this day and this occasion we can look at the text from many angles.**

This is the final, closing service of the Northern Parish. “The hour has come” would then refer to the last hour before the kernel dies, the parish ends.

We look back on a long history of the various congregations, many dreams, hopes, ideas. You and generations before you put in immense efforts to not only build congregations, but also Churches and infrastructure. Unfortunately, unlike with Jesus in John 12 the crowds did not come, the “whole world” did not follow us. On the contrary - more members have left

than what came - they moved away, transferred elsewhere. Families who could not speak German had to look for a different home. Young families with children who wanted them to be involved in children's ministries had to look elsewhere. The numbers dwindled. Core members passed away. A point was reached where you realised: It cannot continue like this! The time has come to end it.

In this context I also want to focus on the words of the Greeks: "We would like to see Jesus" - those who are here today have not lost interest in faith, in the Lord. We want to hear Jesus, follow him. But it cannot continue as is. Finding a new congregation, a new home, is not "treason". "Whoever serves me, must follow me" Jesus says. Christians need nourishment, need fellowship, need the community of fellow Christians. Being a Christian is not only about being a member somewhere but being in a relationship with the Lord.

A building and infrastructure are good to have - but they do not make a congregation. Congregation is a living gathering of Christians. Therefore it is essential that all of you find such a community where you can serve and follow Jesus together with others.

If I end it here, I would, however, not do justice to the text. It would be far too little. It would be like Jesus ending the story in Jerusalem.

I said at the beginning: John is the "global gospel", proclaiming the Saviour of the Universe.

The crowds gathering and following him, the Greeks requesting to meet him are just the tip of the iceberg.

If the parish ends today, it does not mean that there are no crowds wishing to see Jesus. Polokwane is a growing town, this church is situated in a busy part of this growing town.

If we focus on the fact that there are too few Lutherans of German descent we miss the point. Jesus died and rose again, not so that some small groups here and there can serve him, but so that all nations can hear and experience his salvation.

This parish comes to an end - but the Church of Christ does not!

Let us look again at the "kernel of wheat". A farmer who treasures his seed does not place it in a display cabinet or a vault at the bank. He sows it onto the fields.

We can cling to the kernel - our current structures and achievements - or we can say: Lord, this now comes to an end. But let our venues rise again with new vigour and life. Let this place of worship again be filled with praise and prayer, let crowds gather to hear the gospel of Christ!

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For new things to develop it needs people who are open for new things, who look beyond their immediate surrounds. It needs the Philips and the Andrews to open the way.

"The hour has come" - for the parish it definitely is the end of an era. Is it the beginning of something new? Something in a very different form? I hope and pray so - because there are many people out there wishing to see Jesus. Even if the parish comes to an end, the Church of Christ continues to grow - may we all be witness to it and part of it - in whatever form!

Amen

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If the parish ends today, it does not mean that there are no crowds wishing to see Jesus. Polokwane is a growing town, this church is situated in a busy part of this growing town.

If we focus on the fact that there are too few Lutherans of German descent we miss the point. Jesus died and rose again, not so that some small groups here and there can serve him, but so that all nations can hear and experience his salvation.

This parish comes to an end - but the Church of Christ does not!

Let us look again at the "kernel of wheat". A farmer who treasures his seed does not place it in a display cabinet or a vault at the bank. He sows it onto the fields.

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