

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
THE PERFECT PICTURE
JOHN 12:20-33 TPT

Good Morning

Prayer Needs

Our friends decided to bless us last summer for our 40th anniversary by taking us to the Van Gogh immersive Exhibit last summer at the Coliseum here in Fort Wayne - it was utterly delightful! To stand in and among multiple masterpieces was pretty amazing. Vincent Van Gogh was a Dutch Post-Impressionist painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. In just over a decade, he created approximately 2100 artworks, including around 860 oil paintings, most of them in the last two years of his life, between 1888 and 1890. Dying at 37 years of age he left a massive influence.

Many of the works that were displayed felt like a picture of the Netherlands my Father and Mother described simple and unassuming. Without a doubt the painting that captured me in the exhibit was 'Starry night'. There is something about it that captures the imagination - considered his masterpiece it speaks a universal message of longing for beauty in the darkness. Truth is 'Starry night' is not an accurate portrayal of a starry night but it captures something beyond facts.

Denise recently finished Brian Zahnd's book *The Wood Between the Worlds* and in it Brian says this about Van Gogh.

*The role of the artist is not that of a journalist. The role of the journalist is to document the facts. The role of the artist is to alert us to what we may have missed. Art takes us deeper than the facts. Art moves us beyond the sterile realm of raw data into the passionate world of subjective experience. Think of Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*, widely regarded as his masterpiece. Its swirling stars and fantastic colors of blue and yellow make it one of the most recognized paintings in the world. But does it accurately depict a starry night? When you look up at the stars does it factually look like what Van Gogh has placed on his canvas? Of course not. Van Gogh is not an astronomer; he's an artist. Van Gogh is trying to wake us up to the beauty we so easily overlook. *Starry Night*, Van Gogh is shouting at us, Wake up! Pay attention! There's beauty all around you! Don't miss it! What Van Gogh has painted on the canvas is what we should feel in our heart when we behold the mysterious grandeur of the cosmos as seen on a starry night.*

And this is precisely why the crucifixion portrayed with beauty is such a profound theological insight. Of course the crucifixion was ugly—nailing a naked man to a tree to hang there until he's dead is horrifyingly ugly. But that's not all that is present at the crucifixion of Christ. There is also a beauty most sublime. If all we see in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth is the raw data of a Galilean Jew executed by the Roman Empire under Pontius Pilate, we have failed to understand it....At the cross we find the ugliness of human sin, but we also find the beauty of divine love—the beauty that saves the world.

God's people in Jesus' day were faced with a similar problem...God had come but their highest imagination of a King and His Kingdom was firmly fixed to ideas of power, control and force. Yet Jesus clearly proclaimed and displayed for God so LOVED the world that He gave His one and only Son.

- *As Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up...John 3:14. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself, John 12:32*

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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To be lifted up - was not a PR campaign it was in 1st Century Palestine a direct reference to Roman crucifixion.

Beloved in a world and to a people that was filled with images of God Jesus is the Perfect Portrait of the Father and that is Good News! He spoke life, removed darkness and restored beauty! In a moment struggling to find clarity we do not need fake buildings and trappings of religion to catch a glimpse of how God feels about you and me. If you want to know what God is like look at the Perfect Picture – Jesus lifted up! Revealing what is killing us and what is healing us!

Our text today begins with the Greeks coming to the disciples asking to set up a meet and greet with Jesus - they are asking ‘*sir we would like to see Jesus*’ now on some levels this looks amazing.

- Jesus we are finally catching some traction as a ministry
- The people who normally saw the Jews as a group of religious fanatics want to see this Jesus.

Now lets not miss the context one of Jesus best friends Lazarus had died in Bethany just a short walk away from Jerusalem. Jesus comes to Bethany in the midst of the grief of His friends and Lazarus’s sisters Martha and Mary and Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead..

- now news like that spreads pretty quickly!
- For the religious establishment of the day this is alarming - now everyone is going to follow the man Jesus! John 11:47-50

Fascinating is this - you see when the truth of God is revealed to the human heart it will provoke a reaction of either repentance or rejection to be confronted with what is killing you but also what can heal you!

- The religious leaders of the day see Jesus as a threat to their kingdom of power and control. But they are also reflecting the god they have formed in their mind.
- This man has raised a dead person and your conclusion (because their distorted view of God is challenged) their conclusion is **we need to kill Him** (11:53) and don’t miss this as well they decided they **need to kill Lazarus as well** (12:10).
- ‘ Is it not better for one man to die to save the republic?’ vs 50

My point is that their violent response is based in how the picture of how they saw God!

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a Donkey - **a symbol of Peace** and He is proclaiming that the heart of God longs for peace....if you had know what would make for peace.

- The people are waving palm branch’s - **a symbol of Triumph!**
 - Jesus is coming as a lamb in love by His own words.
 - The people around Him are looking for Jesus to **Show up and Show Off!**

Fascinating Jesus response to His disciples telling Him about the Greeks -

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..”

- Now imagine hearing that and your best picture of Messiah is the One who will come in Power and Force - **it will be a ‘shock and awe’ campaign like you have never seen!**
- And then as we listen to Jesus words we hear Him describing a totally different picture...**unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies....wait what?**

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One is the Lens of Triumphal-ism;

- The disciples now have the Greeks checking out their pick for March Madness!
- What is stunning to me is that we still struggle in modern Christianity with these competing visions of Jesus – christian nationalism.
- When we choose to view God ourselves and others through the wrong lens we get this distorted picture - so many times ends in a competition of force and power.
- Do we really think that Gods highest goal of the Church is that we get be the people who are in charge of the culture....

The Other is the Lens of Love that Jesus never parts from

- *for God did not send His Son to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved!*
- This is how John records it - John 12: 28-33
28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him!" 30 Jesus responded and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for yours. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself." 33 Now He was saying this to indicate what kind of death He was going to die.

Its like He is coming for all the world in Love - yup that is exactly what He said! I know what I am about - do you?

- **I am going to be the perfect Picture of the Father...**
- Here it is 6 days before the Celebration of the Passover - story is told of God's deliverance.
- Jesus is proclaiming a deliverance **that will come from His death!**

We want to see Triumphal Jesus -

- What they got was a Thundering Voice from Heaven...
- Now for God's people that thundering noise was a reminder of how God came to His people on Mt Sinai - **Jesus said that voice was for you.**

1. The Voice was affirming Gods opinion!

I am going to glorify the Son but not by power force and coercion but in joining my Son on the Cross!

- Beloved the Thundering sound of the Good News of the Gospel is not a question of whether or not you believe in God -
 - The first sound is the proclamation that God believes in you.
 - Before we could see Him - He saw us and said YES!
 - One of the visions of the Jesus death that has existed in Christian circles is that Jesus had to go to the cross to satisfy the wrath of God...**in this image we have a Jesus actually saving us from God.**

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- Yet the scripture says God so love the world he gave - that He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The creeds and confessions of the Church proclaim that God did not split apart from Himself to save man - He saved man from sin by becoming sin 2 Cor 5:21 so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ!
- Beloved the thundering Opinion of God is heard in eternity by John when he hears the anthem of Heaven worth is the lamb who purchased men for God.
 - The thundering Voice has proclaimed Gods good opinion expressed in His Son!
 - The sound was for you.

2. Jesus knows the real Picture!

- **The Prince of this world is about to be driven out and I will draw all men unto myself - How?**
- In just a few days these men and women who are waving the Palm branches of triumph will be shouting 'Away with Him'.
- The word used in John 19:15 in the original language was a chant - it translates - away with Him. What they actually said was 'lift him up'.
 - It was the chant of a murderous mob....
 - Why did Jesus die?
 - Because He came to His own John 1:11 and His own did not receive Him...
 - **Lift Him up** - was a demand for blood - we will not be satisfied unless we see our idea of justice!
 - He died because we killed Him and the inequity of us all fell on Him Isaiah 53

So watch this Jesus said to Nicodemus - like Moses lifted the serpent so the Son of man must be lifted up (same word) John 3:14 ...for God so loved the word that He gave His one and only Son...

- Lift Him up...take him away
 - What was being lifted up?
 - According to Jesus like Moses serpent He would take everything that is killing man in their body soul and spirit Isaiah 53.
- **What is Jesus lifting up and now saving man from -(what is killing them)**
 - Satan - bondage to Satan - prince of this world is about to be driven out.
 - Sin - through radical forgiveness
 - From Death by entering death and overcoming it
- The Hebrew writer puts it this way 2:15
 - free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.
 - Paul says what got lifted up was everything that stood against us....Col 2:14-15

3. Now watch this - that word Lift up also means take away....the One who was lifted up took it all away by revealing Love – what is healing you!

The real Picture?

- He removed every vapor of distance and restored it all....
- I want to submit that it was not just what is killing us that was lifted up....

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- **It was Love that was lifted up** - if you want to know the One true God - look at the Cross.
- Beloved it was not your sin that held Him it was His love that held Him and that is proclaimed!

If I am lifted up it is not Power, Control and Force on display but Love...and I will draw all men to Myself...because it is His kindness that leads us to repentance!

- Sin death and destruction have been lifted up and defeated and driven out.
- **Now Love is on display!**

But also I want to submit that we see what an actual Human being looks like in Jesus self giving self emptying love and forgiveness.

- We are most human when we choose to loose our poor picture of life and embrace His perfect reflection of life in self giving self emptying love and forgiveness.
- *Seeing Jesus isn't a spectator sport. It is a way to be followed, a truth to be embodied, a life to be lived. It's being a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bear much fruit. That's where we see him. It's the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for new life to arise.*

What does all this mean?

- **It means we need to discern all things through the lens of the Perfect Portrait- the scripture our times and our very lives!**

Close with something from The Wood Between the Worlds

The transformation of the Roman cross from an abhorrent symbol of death into a beautiful symbol of love is a testament to the redeeming power of Christ. If the cross can be saved, the world can be saved. If crucifixion can be made beautiful, all things can be made beautiful. The hope we have for the healing of a world marred by sin and death is that God makes all things beautiful in his time (Eccles 3:11). When artists create beautiful crucifixes, they are not only calling our attention to the beauty of God's redeeming love, they are also depicting our eschatological hope.

Theopoetics of the Cross

Three trillion trees.

They came to be on the third day of Creation.

That double-blessed day of verdant goodness.

Three trillion trees.

One became the wood upon which the Son of God was hung.

A tree created on the third day.

The third day—the day of three trillion trees.

And on the third day of new creation the stone was rolled away.

On the third day the gardener walked again in the garden.

On the third day the firstborn emerged from a cocoon called death.

On the third day a new world was born.

There is the world that was and the world to come, and between those two worlds is the wood upon which the Son of God was hung.

Three trillion trees.

One became the wood between the worlds.

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Closing Prayer and Communion

A Collect for Fridays

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Amen.

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