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Sermon preached Lent 5 4/2/06 Text: John 12:20-33

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Caution: Following Jesus Can Be Hazardous to Your Health

Two Greek guys had come up to Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Passover.

I'm envisioning Passover as kind of a spring break in Jerusalem. The whole place coming alive, families who traveled there every year for the holidays, older kids & teens who loved the carnival atmosphere, business men and a few savvy women who knew there were deals to be made: rooms to be rented, food to be sold, and especially the wine dealers geared up for the big event... you do know that there are 4 cups of wine you are supposed to drink at the Passover Seder? (*come to our Passover Seder next Sunday night & you'll find out about that*)

So we don't know exactly why these two Greek guys show up in Jerusalem for Passover. They may have been what were known as 'God-fearers': people who are at the edge of faith... People who are *interested* in God. People who *feel* that this didn't all happen by itself... people who aren't impressed with the *culture's* gods: Pan: Mithras Artemis, god of sports, gods of military power, gods of fertility and totally controlled family planning...

The "god-fearers" in Jesus' day were non-Jews who had grown tired of *Those* gods... they were people who had a sense that maybe there was something *to* this Jewish notion of One God who was more ultimate than any of that.

They must have heard something about Jesus who seemed to be pretty connected to this One God.

So the two Greeks search out some disciples,
 Is there something to this man Jesus? Can you introduce us?

In Our Savior's church right now, it's our children's Sunday School where people are coming and asking to be introduced to Jesus. They won't say it in exactly those words but that's what's happening. Parents come and are in effect saying, would you introduce my kids to Jesus? And by the way, I'd like to meet him too. And you Sunday School teachers, and shepherds, and activity center coordinators, Dads & Mom's and teenagers, you're saying sure, come this way. Jesus is here. It's exciting being the church right now. I love to see this happening.

But as for these Greeks in the Bible, and *maybe* for us “Greeks” today, maybe there should have been a big CAUTION sign for everybody: Warning! Jesus can be Hazardous to your Health!

You know about warning signs, right?
the Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch organization began a contest a few years ago to see which warning labels are the wackiest.

Recent “real-live” winners include:

A 13-inch wheel on a wheelbarrow: *"Not intended for highway use."*

A box of Nytol® Sleep Aid *"Warning -- May cause drowsiness."*

A Car Jack *"For lifting purposes only."*

A snow sled *"Beware: sled may develop high speed under certain snow conditions."*

My favorite: household iron *"Never iron clothes while they are being worn."*

Well in today’s Gospel I’m thinking there should have a warning sign before these Greeks got to meet Jesus.

There was a colorful brochure that came in my mail yesterday from a neighboring pastor... who was featuring himself with star celebrities and promising only “...positive messages and upbeat music!” at HIS church. I did smile just a little bit... See, apparently nobody got the word to *Jesus* about having uplifting messages all the time. No sooner does his little evangelism team show up with these 2 Greeks and do you know what his sermon topic is? How he’s going to die!!!! And how anybody who wants to follow him had better get ready to die too. “Like a grain of wheat,” ... Jesus *could* be smiling as he says this...to these would be recruits: “ you’ve got to *die* to be a true follower of mine.”

Several decades ago author, Annie Dillard, asked the question, *"Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ...Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? ... It is madness to wear ladies' hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews..."*

definitely there should at least be a warning label on the Bible... *NOT all messages are upbeat and positive. Handle with care!*

I found myself wondering this week, was there a warning to Abdul Rahman, of Afghanistan, 15 years ago, when he converted to Christianity, did anybody have the honesty to tell him, one day this could endanger your life?

There was talk a few months ago about a conspiracy against Christians. You know, stores who wish you happy holidays instead of Merry Christmas and not allowing the ten commandments in big monuments in public courtrooms.

Well, the Bible has got news for us, today, there IS a conspiracy going on, but it's not our culture's conspiracy, it's Jesus himself. He 's the one who wants you & me to die.

But it's only so that So that you & I can live.

And what a great uplifting message that is after all. Martin Luther talks about it in terms of it being the Old Adam old Eve inside us who must die. My way my feelings my relationships my comfort zones – my worries about how my neighbor's treating me, my savoring the sweet aftertaste of times I've been wronged, my figuring out how I'm going to get my fair share of the money... all gone.

dead. Like a grain of wheat planted in the ground. So that the true you can sprout. So that the true beloved daughter the cherished son, the precious child of God, can begin to emerge.

I planted onions on Monday, and I had to tear apart the clusters, kill them in effect, in order to plant them, for the new sprouts to grow.

Phil Hansen, youth director at St. Luke's in Waukesha (where the teens are going tonight) told me about a mission trip he went on his youth last summer to Toronto, serving the homeless and poor there, and how the students were introduced to sections of the town that were havens for drug deals, prostitution, homelessness. Because the street is home for many of these people, the teens & young adults were instructed to respectfully act as if walking thru someone's kitchen living room, and bedroom, for in essence that's exactly what they were doing.

Most intriguing says Phil, was the direction to acknowledge everyone that approached them for a hand out... not to give everybody money, no, they should say "I'm sorry I can't help you with that today..." But by looking these people in the eye and politely responding, they could provide the gift of dignity to people who often go days without being acknowledged by another human being.

The teens were asked to die to their embarrassment and fear. To die to that little ugly part of them that says, I just want you to go away. You are not my problem.

They had to die to that So they could be raised to the power of following a living Lord who draws all people, all people, to himself.

Sue K. (from our own congregation) tells of the first time she went to serve at Redeemer in inner city Milwaukee, & how she had to die to her feelings of inadequacy. Of not knowing what she was doing. About being one of the only white woman in a sea of black faces. She had to die.

Whether you're a Greek or a Jew , whether you're a person at the edge of faith or a fifth generation Lutheran . It's hazardous to your health to meet & follow Jesus. But oh what can happen, when you first learn to die.

Amen