One of the great metaphors of the Bible is “the journey.” The Bible is filled with journey upon journey. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture is full of people on the move. In the beginning of the Old Testament, Abraham journeys from Ur of the Chaldees to the Promised Land. Many generations later, Abraham’s descendants journey from slavery and oppression in Egypt into the land of Israel. Many generations after that, they journey back to their Promised Land after the tragic downfall of their civilization and their forced exile in Babylon. In the New Testament, Jesus himself journeys through Palestine, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. As he journeys, he shows people what that Kingdom looks like by his deeds of love and power. After the Resurrection, Paul and the apostles journey all over the Roman Empire, and their message reaches to the ends of the earth – and here we are, millennia later, with our journeys touching theirs.

It makes sense that the concept of “the journey” would be so central to Scripture, because we human beings are journeying people. We make sense of our lives by understanding them as journeys, as the unfolding story of who we are and what we do in the world. We think and talk and worry about our career arcs, or our family histories, or our financial forecasts, or our estate plans. In our better moments we think and talk and pray about our spiritual journeys – all
ways of thinking about our lives, our stories, about the journey that has been, and the journey that will be. In some deep way, journeying is an elemental part of who we are as human beings.

This image, this metaphor of the journey has been very helpful to me over the past week or so, as I’ve tried to understand the deeper meaning of this morning’s reading from the twelfth chapter of John’s Gospel. John tells us in this passage about the moment when several different journeys intersect, and he tells us something about what it means that those journeys come together.

The first journeyer in John’s Gospel is, of course, Jesus himself. From its very first words, John’s Gospel makes it clear that Jesus is on a journey – a journey that is far more than just a walking tour of Palestine. The pre-eternal Word of God, who is with God and who is God, has journeyed into this world, has chosen to be with us, to become flesh, to reveal his divine being and nature and love to us by becoming a human person in the man Jesus of Nazareth. For John’s Gospel, this is the first and greatest journey – the cosmic journey of Christ from the Father into this world, through suffering and death and then back to the glory of the Father. Every other journey in John’s Gospel, all of the lives and experiences of all the other people in John’s Gospel, only make sense in the light of that great journey of Christ. John’s Gospel wants to tell us that apart from the great journey of Christ, our lives don’t really get anywhere.
Apart from the grace and power and love of Christ, our lives are just a kind of
going in circles. But, John wants to tell us, in the light of the great journey of
Christ, our lives can be a journey into God.

There are other journeyers in this morning’s Gospel. John doesn’t tell us their
names – all we know about them is that they are “some Greeks.” They are the
only Greeks – the only non-Jews, that is – in John’s Gospel who encounter
Jesus during his ministry. They have somehow heard of Jesus, they have learned
something about him, and what they’ve learned has given them a desire to be
with him. They have journeyed to be with Jesus, perhaps over a very long
distance. That distance may be geographical, or spiritual, or both. They seek
out the follower of Jesus who has the most Greek-sounding name – Philip –
and they ask Philip to arrange a meeting with Jesus. And in this moment, their
lives, their journeys, and the cosmic journey of Christ from God and to God,
suddenly and dramatically intersect.

And that, Jesus says, is precisely the point. The journey of Jesus, the journey of
destiny and salvation and healing that he is traveling, now starts to touch not
just Jews but non-Jews. The Greeks have arrived. “The hour,” Jesus’ decisive
moment of glory and revelation that will climax in the Cross, has come. This is
the moment, in John’s Gospel, when the full meaning and power of Jesus’
journey begins to be revealed. This is the moment when the saving journey of
Christ begins to be revealed as the work of God that will heal and save and transform not just the covenant people of Israel, but the whole human race. “The hour has come,” Jesus says, “and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”

These mysterious, unnamed Greeks become the sign that all human journeys, all human lives, find their meaning in Christ. These mysterious, unnamed Greeks are the people through whom Jesus demonstrates that he is drawing every person, bending every journey, toward himself. Christ, now that he is lifted up from the earth by his crucifixion and his resurrection, has become the pole star, the magnetic north, for every journey, for every person, for the meaning and destiny of every individual and of the whole human race. All our journeys are destined to find their meaning by intersecting his great journey. Until our journeys are caught up in the journey of Christ from God and to God, we really are just going around in circles of our own making. Once we make Christ’s journey our own – or rather, once Christ makes our journey his own – then and only then are we are safely on the road to God.

This morning some members of our community are going to take a major step in making the journey of Christ their own. This morning three young men are going to be presented to this body of Christians as candidates for Holy Baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter. Like the Greeks in today’s Gospel, they
have been journeying toward Jesus. Like those Greeks, they have covered some ground, both geographically and spiritually. Today they are sharing with us their desire to see Jesus, their desire to let Christ’s journey from God and to God be their journey and their destiny. And they are giving us an enormous gift. In their faith and their commitment and their willingness to let the journey of their lives be taken up into the cosmic journey of Christ, they are revealing to us just a little bit more of God’s glory. They are the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in this morning’s Gospel, before our very eyes. Christ our God has been lifted up from the earth. He is drawing all people to himself. You and I and these three candidates for Holy Baptism and all of us together have received the unimaginable gift and privilege and joy of making the Godward journey of Christ our own.

But there is one last detail about this Gospel passage that has puzzled me for years. What happened to the Greeks? Do they get to see Jesus? Doesn’t Jesus ever talk to them? Do they ever get what they came for? John’s Gospel doesn’t say. It just leaves them – and us – hanging. And for years, that loose end in the story drove me crazy.

But now I think I am starting to understand. I think the Greeks did see Jesus. I think John’s Gospel is suggesting to us that the Greeks did see everything they needed to see of Jesus – because they had come to Jerusalem, and they were
going to see his suffering and his death and perhaps even be eyewitnesses of his Resurrection. It’s as if they came seeking an interview, but what they got was to SEE the cataclysmic, earthshaking events that were going to unfold in Jerusalem over the next few days. If they showed up, they would see. If they saw, and let the cosmic journey of Christ fully intersect theirs – if they saw, and understood what they were seeing, and if they believed – they would find what they were seeking. They just needed to show up for the next few days. They needed to show up – for Holy Week. They had to be brave enough to take it all in, and to believe what they heard and saw.

I'll see you during Holy Week. Amen.
The Lessons

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:(1-4)5-10

[Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.]
So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

"You are my Son,

today I have begotten you";

as he says also in another place,

"You are a priest forever,

according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

John 12:20-33
Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"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. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.