

**Series:** Come and Follow  
**Title:** It's a Matter of Death to Life  
**Text:** John 12:20-33  
**Key Word:** Signs  
**Proposition:** Everyone will see and submit to the signs that lead to life

Good morning everyone. My name is Chris Farmer. I thank God that I can serve as one of your pastors. We are thrilled that you have chosen to come and worship with us today. God is in this place. He is here to reveal His ways and purposes so that we can live the life God created us to live. He desires that we reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Jesus Christ. As followers of Christ, we strive to love Him and others, to grow to be like Jesus and to serve the world.

In preparation for Easter, we are learning what Jesus meant by his call to come and follow Him. Today, the Spirit of Christ offers us some signs that lead to life.

Tom Smallwood's remarkable story provides hope in the emptiness of double-digit unemployment. Growing up in Michigan's I-75 corridor, Tom had a generational connection with GM. His father built V-6 engines. His father-in-law and brother also worked for GM. Tom started working the first shift for \$ 16.00 per hour along with solid pension and health benefits.

However, installing seat belts in trucks may have paid his mortgage, but never fueled his passion. Bowling really made his heart dance with joy. On weekday evenings and various weekends, Tom would throw his 15 lb ball in amateur tournaments, winning almost \$ 200,000 in prize money over a 12-year period.

Along with thousands of other GM workers, he found himself in the unemployment line. He invested his free time to pursue his passion, bowling. A local bowling alley let him practice free after learning that his applications at Lowe's and the Home Depot were not yielding results.

Later he paid the \$ 1,500 entrance fee to a qualifying tournament for the PBA Championship. Tom finished fourth and secured his spot in the PBA Tournament of Champions. In January of this year, Tom won this tournament with its \$ 50,000 grand prize and a two-year contract in the pro bowling circuit. From a mundane assembly line to dark unemployment to PBA Champion, Tom Smallwood testifies that a death can lead to life. (Sports Illustrated, March 15, 2010; Michael Farber, page 60-63)

Whether one finds themselves employed in a boring, dead end job or in the tomb of unemployment, in a dying marriage or seeking life after a dead marriage, or sulking with tears of regret, sadness, or loneliness, God offers us signs that lead to life.

According to John, the chief priest had made plans to kill Jesus and Lazarus, They wanted them dead because many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Jesus left Bethany and headed toward Jerusalem. A great crowd greeted him with palm branches and joyous praise as he rode into the city. They hailed him as their king. His growing popularity though threatened the Pharisees. Let us pick up the story in John 12:20.

Here we see God revealing a few signs that lead to life. **First, we see a sign of life when we witness seekers seeking Jesus.** It was all going well. The worshippers at these special services rated them as the best ever. Suddenly, some different guests arrived and parked in the regular attendees' parking spaces. These guests knew what they wanted. The Spirit of God had prepared their hearts. From the word on the street, they knew that this Jesus had what they were looking for. In verse 21, we see that they approached one of his followers and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."

Of course, its not just special services. It's the Feast of Passover. It is going spectacularly well because of this Jesus, who raised someone from the dead, and who rides into the city on a donkey while the crowds explode with excitement: "Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

Hearing the voice of Christ, these Greeks seek out someone whom they identify with. (Philip's name is predominately Greek and he is from a Gentile area.) He is the easiest to approach because he is from their social network. Personal, family, and neighborhood ties are at the heart of lasting faith sharing. It is not that they are spiritual fans seeking a spiritual celebrity. They really want to get to know Jesus. Philip is a little apprehensive so he secures Andrew's assistance in bringing them to Jesus.

Andrew knows that Jesus to know welcomes genuine interruptions. A woman touches his cloak, children rush to his knee, a blind beggar shouts out, a little man climbs a tree, a thief speaks on the cross. Every time, these unscheduled interruptions from outsiders usher us into deep places where Jesus heals, teaches, and saves. We see this in this story.

Like many today, these Greeks were immersed in a spiritual potpourri, a culture of different religions, Greek mythology, Hebrew faith, Roman gods, and secular thought. Yet, these Greeks sought after the Truth among many truths. They had one desire to meet Jesus. The Holy Spirit sharpened their scattered vision and attention by what they had seen and heard about a poor, homeless prophet who entered into Jerusalem, hailed as a king. Their focus brought them near the life they longed for.

If you had one wish, one desire what would it be? If your neighbor had one desire, one wish, what would it be? Would you be willing to risk it all to meet Jesus? Would you be willing to risk it all to bring seekers to Jesus? Who or what are you seeking?.....Who do you know is seeking?....Would you bring them to Jesus? A seeker seeking Jesus is a sign of life.

**Next, we know that life is on the way for the time has come.** In verse 23 Jesus said, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”* The visit of the Greeks indicates the crucial hour. Things had been building up to a crisis and that crisis had now come. Now the hour of Jesus glory has arrived. So often, he has said

that it will come. The coming of the Gentiles, who represent a waiting world, is the sign that the time to lay down His life has come.

However, this incredible announcement staggered, bewildered and amazed his audience. They had understood that God would send an undefeatable world conqueror. They believed that God had kept Him on a leash until the day when he would destroy all of Israel's enemies. Amidst their troubles and sufferings in slavery and a barren wilderness, the Jews never forgot and never gave up on that dream. Yet, this Jesus comes and redefines their dream. Yes, He defines His coming as mighty, but His power is demonstrated through a lowly, bloody cross. He defines His coming in the giving up on his Life that others might find it. He defines His coming as the letting go of the praise of the crowd for the praise and worship of the hosts of angels. He defines His coming by surrendering a passion for the world, for a passion fulfilling His Father's mission.

My friends, those who dare to follow Jesus embrace and live out this vision. Followers of Christ realize that the time has come to give up selfish ambitions and agendas. The time has come to hate what God hates, and to love what God loves. The time has come to let go of greed, cruelty, lusts, and apathy to passionately invite and welcome all who are seeking after God. Followers of Jesus Christ can only share in the resurrected life of the Lord if they die with Him.

**Next, we know that life is on the way for sacrifice ushers in life.** In verse 24, Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, 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.*” A grain of wheat must die to one form of existence if there is to be a harvest. There is no fruit apart from death and burial of the seed. It is the same with Jesus, who speaks here of His own unique death. There will be “no multiplication of life” without His being cast into the ground.

The grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was preserved, in safety and security. It was when it was thrown into the cold, dark ground, and buried there as if in a tomb, that it bore fruit. It was by the death of the martyrs that the church grew. It is always because people have been prepared to die that the great things have lived. It is sometimes only when a person buries his personal aims and ambitions that he begins to be of real use to God.

Only by spending life do we retain life. The person who loves his life is moved by two aims. He is motivated by selfishness and he is moved by the desire for security. One's own advancement, preservation and safety are the two things, which are the driving force of life. We have only to think of what this world would have lost if there had been no one who were not prepared to forget their personal safety, security, preferences, selfish gain, and selfish advancement or preservation. No doubt, we may live longer if we take the broad way and thus avoid all strain and risk. No doubt, we will exist longer – but we will never live at all.

Jesus says those who fall in love with themselves will love themselves to a lonely spiritual death. However, those who do the opposite of self-love—unselfishly

serving the world by sharing the word—will "death" themselves to life. By so many daily little deaths to pride and sacrificial acts of holy boldness, they will live cross-shaped lives.

I am reminded of a pastor who tells the story of his daughter who answered the call to go into mission work. Like most high school students, she struggled to find her own faith. She wanted to know in her heart that all of what she'd been taught to believe was true and that Jesus Christ was real. She was headed down a dark road. However, God pursued her down that road. She eventually found a faith of her own. After graduating from high school, she said, "I don't think God wants me to go to college right now. I want to take a year to go to Haiti, and I want to serve people in a medical mission."

Her dad said, "Are you sure you want to do this? Its 3,000 miles away from home. AIDS is everywhere. It's the poorest country in the western hemisphere. And do you know it's controlled by the voodoo religion?"

"I know all that," she said. "But I feel like God wants me to go and help those people." Dad said, "Okay. If that's what you want to do, we'll make it happen."

The day came when Mom and Dad put their little girl on an airplane, watched it lift off, not knowing if they would ever hear from her again. Then one night they received an e-mail from her. She wrote: "Dad, tonight has been the most remarkable night of my life. I was called out to this hut to deliver a baby. Dad, I've only delivered one, and that was with somebody. I'd never done this by myself, but I was the only

one around. They called me, I get to this hut, and there's this naked, screaming woman on the dirt floor. I got a flashlight, and I'm thinking, *Here I am, 18-years-old, and I'm in a hut in a third-world country with a naked, screaming, pregnant lady. I have a flashlight, and I don't know what I'm doing—but I'm here.* To make matters worse, this female voodoo witch doctor walked into the hut, dressed in her red and blue voodoo garb, and began to chant some voodoo incantation in Creole. She put some kind of oil on the lady's head, and when she started to walk away from me and the woman, she stopped at the woman's belly, put some other kind of salve there, and walked the opposite direction—all while chanting this Creole spell. I didn't know what to do. She stood at the head of this woman and stared a hole through me. When I was getting ready to deliver this baby, I just looked back at her, and I started singing. I knew she didn't understand English, but I just started singing: 'Our God is an awesome God, he reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power, and love, and our God is an awesome God.'

The voodoo woman became completely unglued. She grabbed all of her stuff and ran out of the hut. That night I knew that that baby was going to be born with the blessing of God and not the curse of Satan.

After her dad, the pastor read this message, his daddy side thought: *You get on a plane tomorrow! What are you doing in a hut with a voodoo woman in the first place?* However, the Holy Spirit began to speak to his heart and he thought, *you go girl. Way to make a difference with your life! Way to stop floating around*

*accidental-like! Way to put your life in the hands of the destiny-maker! Way to make a splash!*

Friends, Who knows who that little baby she delivered that night is going to grow up to touch and who *that* person is going to touch—all because of one courageous teenager, fresh out of high school said, "Okay, God, I am willing to risk it all. I want to put my life in your hands; I want to make a difference."

Jesus said: If you insist on saving your life—[if you insist on the comfort of playing it safe]—you're going to lose your opportunity for life! Only those who give away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it really means to really, really live. Sacrifice ushers in life, life that affects future generations and eternity.

**Finally, we know that life is on the way when purpose overcomes reluctance.** In verse 27, Jesus said, "*now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!*" Jesus did not automatically or casually go to the cross. The flesh shrinks from this awesome death. Here the anguish, the longing of Jesus to avoid the cross, is boldly recorded. However, there is no turning back from His purpose established in the counsels of heaven. A sense of reluctance or caution or momentary pause confirms one's destiny.

Friends, there will never be a harvest of those far from God unless we fulfill our purpose to reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Christ.

We may be hesitant and indecisive in seeking to obey our Father. We see through a glass darkly and hear so unclearly even though we are eager to be faithful to God's purposes. However, as we take a feeble step of faith with what light we have and move out we are affirmed and blessed by the Voice of the Father whom we seek to obey.

Where are we reluctant to follow? What is the source of our hesitancy or indecisiveness? Now is the time to step out into the unknown in faith and we will here God's voice of approval. Now is the time to live out our lives as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God as our spiritual act of worship. Now is the time to seek and welcome those who are seeking God. 2664