Whoever serves me must follow me, says the Lord; and where I am, there also will my servant be.

“The hour has come.”

Today’s Gospel marks a turning point in the life of Jesus. He acknowledges this Himself with the words. “The hour has come.” It is as if everything in His life has been building up to this moment. Some biblical scholars take the view that the visit of the Greeks asking to see Jesus is a milestone in the Gospel story. At that time, Greeks were considered with mistrust by most Jews, but here are Greeks recognizing that Jesus is somebody they should meet. The disciples don’t know what to do about the visit, but when they finally decide to tell Jesus, He reacts positively. It is as if everything is falling into place, and He and God will be glorified.

Another way to put this is that the covenant that Jeremiah talks about in the first reading (probably from a prison cell) is being realized. God will pursue sinners, and people can have a direct relationship with God. Jesus says that the lives He and the disciples have lived and loved up to now will have to be left behind to begin the new life ahead. This new development will bring pain and suffering, but it is necessary not only for Jesus, but for His followers as well. At the end of today’s Gospel, Jesus says that when He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all people to Himself.

With these words Jesus reveals a great truth, that we all belong together, and the basis of our togetherness is that we are all equally loved by God.

To believe and live out that truth of God’s love is simultaneously our greatest joy and our greatest difficulty. Christians are not protected from pain and sacrifice. We are called to serve God and the world. We are called to find our common humanity amidst all that divides people today. Jesus will help us in this, and there will be times when His presence breaks in upon us and becomes so real that we will feel like one of the disciples sitting in His actual presence.

Lent is the season when many Christians give up something as an outward expression of an inward transformation. To give up something is to relinquish it, to lose it, to renounce it. Today Jesus hints at the ultimate loss anyone might experience: to give up life as one might normally live it. Losses are thrust upon us that are totally involuntary, like the death of a loved one, sickness, or losing one’s job. In giving up, letting go, and dying to some things, says Jesus, we can position ourselves to live life all the more fully.

Note that when the Greeks approached, they came to Jesus through Philip and Andrew. In our neighborhoods and workplaces, we are the Philips and Andrews through whom enquirers are to come. Who else? It is we who are to show them who Jesus really is and what He has done for them, us and all the world. We are also to look for Jesus among them. With faith, we can see Him in other people. We can see Him in the Word being proclaimed from the lectern, in the Eucharistic Host, in all the sacraments and in the events of our lives. However bitter or however joyful.

Lent is about changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us now. Lent urges us to wake up out of our lack of interest and self-satisfaction and choose a path that gives us life and brings life to others.