



Look Up
Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (March 17, 2024)

Don't Look Up is a 2021 political satire comedy. The film tells the story of two astronomers attempting to warn humanity about an approaching comet that will destroy human civilization. As the comet approaches Earth, businesspeople and politicians divert peoples' attention and declare there is *no need to look up* and be concerned with the comet. The impact event is an allegory for climate change, and the film is a satire of government, political, and media indifference to the climate crisis.

Conversely, *Jesus insists on us to look up*. This encouragement comes to all as he announces that he will be lifted up indicating how he is going to die. Being lifted up, in fact, is a metaphorical expression for crucifixion.

In the gospel of John, Jesus spoke about this tragic event for the first time in his encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:14). In his conversation with this Jewish sympathetic leader, Jesus referenced an incident from the time of the Exodus (Numbers 21:4–9). The people of Israel were suffering from a self-inflicted plague and could only be saved by looking to a bronze serpent held up on a pole. God seems to be saying: "Have the courage to look up and face what's causing you grief and you shall be saved!"

Jesus announces that the Son of Man (the Human One) will be "***lifted up***" on a cross for others to look to and be saved. There, on the cross, our Sin pins him. There, on the cross, God's Grace is offered to all.

The same expression is used openly in today's gospel for the disciples and the crowd to hear.

The story develops this way. Following his anointing by Mary in Bethany (John 12:1-3), and his entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-19), and just before his disciples' foot-washing during the last supper (John 13:1-12), we are told of this public scene where some Greeks approach Philip (the one disciple with a Greek name!) and ask "We wish to *see* Jesus." (John 12:20-21)

John uses the verb "*to see*" as an invitation to look deeply into faith matters; to look at Jesus newly, differently, and again with perceiving and receiving hearts; to look and find or, better, to be found; to look and enjoy the meaning of God's love for us. This is our deepest desire, and I suspect this is even the request of a cynical, unbelieving world.

Jesus' long reply (vv. 23-32) doesn't make much sense, frankly. He doesn't seem to be responding to the inquiry much like politicians who respond to questions with answers that reflect their own agenda. Like them, Jesus seems to be on a different page. And, yet, is he?

Jesus' hour is finally here. He's dodged that hour all along. He was well aware of what that "hour" entailed from the very beginning. He knew when it wasn't time for him to die until it was.

During his early life and ministry, we are twice told that "*his hour had not yet come*" (7:30 and 8:20). Toward the end of his life, Jesus realized that the hour was at hand, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). He recoiled from the horror of it but knew that this hour was the fulfillment of his mission, "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" (12:27).

The forward momentum of Jesus' hour in the Gospel of John reaches a climax at the Cross, "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1). "After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you'" (17:1).

Jesus’ “hour to be glorified” for John isn’t on Easter morning but as he is faithful and loyal and breathes his last on the cross. Jesus’ glory is to show God’s glory, to reveal who God is in the face of corruption of the heart, hatred, despair, and total separation from the source of Life and Love. God’s glory and Jesus’ is shown in the loving and persistent pursuit of sinful people and the deep desire to reconcile all creatures to the Creator for thus much did God love the world.

But Jesus is aware that this radical love comes at a *cost* to him. Jesus is aware that people’s stubbornness and trust in their own reading of reality, understanding of social dynamics and maneuvering, people’s insistence to follow their own devices, and cling to their pride would need much patience, steadiness, wisdom, and endurance. His love for God and for people will be tested. His trust stretched but did not break.¹

It would be nice to receive **a sign from heaven** to support his choices and strengthen his ministry. Say, God’s clear voice affirming that he is strong and on the right path. And God does make God’s will known. But it is we humans in our weakness who demand a sign from heaven when in doubt. Jesus, in fact, is quick to confirm that that voice is not so much for him as it is for us.

So, is Jesus beyond human emotions? Beyond fear? Beyond doubt? Beyond grief? Beyond frustration, and beyond despair? No, he carries all that to the cross. He is able and willing to do that because of the great trust he has in God borne of his unity with God. He is convinced that *only if a seed falls and dies can it bring forth life.*

Servants and disciples of the Lord will have to *look down first*, at the soil, the humus, the dark organic matter that receives, nurtures, transforms, and like a womb gives life.

Humus is the Latin word that gives us *humility* in English. And humility is the opposite of pride, a sense of superiority or self-reliance.

Humility is what paves the way to trust in God. It’s in humility, the letting go of one’s self-serving plans, that we learn to follow Jesus, to

¹ In Matthew 27:46 Jesus is desperate and quotes the beginning of Ps 22.

see who Jesus is and what he is about. And we follow him into the ground: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.”

There is no other way. All other ways are our own way to escape, to save ourselves. But we don't want to hear it, *we resist his way, he needs to repeat it again and again: the Son of Man (the Human One) needs to be lifted up.*

He did not die of old age. He did not die of sickness. He was made an enemy of the State, silenced, plotted against, brutalized, and killed because *his teaching was politically unacceptable (if he only stuck to spiritual matters, right?)*, and upset the powerful. His own disciples will follow in his footsteps...in their own time when they stop resisting and awake to the Light. This is a hard message. No wonder he had to repeat himself several times.²

May we grow in humility and look up at him who will draw all people to himself. Amen.

² John 3:14; 8:28; and here at 12:32.