

March 17, 2024 (Lent 5 B)

John 12:20-33

“Spiritual Magnetism”

One of God’s curious and complicated designs in creation is magnetism. It’s a huge topic, and the science here runs deep. Life on our planet requires it – for the magnetic field shields us from harmful charged particles from the sun (and its rate of decay is yet more proof of a young earth). Almost all our modern technology depends upon this aspect of God’s design in some way. And yet – little children can appreciate and play with simple magnets, discovering their **polarity**: this way they stick / this way they repel.

There is also a type of *spiritual magnetism* . . . that we can see here in the text before us: **John 12:20–33** (NIV 11)

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Global mission work across time has always been going on, and here we see an example of it. These were likely Greek converts to Judaism (like those who showed up on Pentecost – see Acts 2). *But how did they know about Jesus / what had they heard about Him / what did they believe about Him . . . all that remains a mystery to us.*

But, like the Wise Men (when Jesus was very young) – they were drawn to find Him and meet Him by this **“spiritual magnetism”**. There must be millions of untold stories out there about how God has been drawing people to find and meet His wonderful Son. Each one of God’s people has a story about how they were drawn to Jesus through life.

Jesus, on the other hand . . . was drawn to the CROSS:

23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, 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. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Spiritual magnetism was pulling Jesus toward His own horrible death, where (strangely enough) He would be glorified. Everything about Jesus was the polar opposite of how things typically work / how people think in this world of sin. He explains that it’s like a seed going in the ground, which “dies” and is buried . . . then produces an abundance of LIFE! And – that His followers must also be drawn to LIFE . . . *through death*.

It’s just such an “unnatural” path for us – because our fear of death and revulsion of it is so powerful. Jesus’ true humanity comes out here as He saw that dreadful DEATH path right before Him:

27 “Now my soul 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. 28 Father, glorify your name!”

His Father in heaven then (highlighting Jesus’ Divine nature) speaks in a thunderous way – as He did at Jesus’ Baptism and the Transfiguration. God was blessing this tough path and pushing people toward His Son: **Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.**

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

We see this magnetism pulling people toward Jesus from every nation, all across the globe, down through history. ALL His children are drawn to the **CROSS** – a horrific symbol of Roman cruelty and brutality . . . has become the chief symbol of our Faith. For there, on the CROSS / in the death of Jesus – we find forgiveness of sins, peace, and eternal salvation. We were ALL there on Good Friday.

It makes sense that all **believers** are drawn to Jesus on the cross, and they bow before Him in worship, respect, and honor for His great sacrifice for us. But . . . Jesus said He would draw **all people to Himself**. That WILL *fully* happen upon His glorious return, when every human being who ever lived (including all those hate and reject Him) – will be forced down on their knees to acknowledge Him . . . even though every fiber of their being is (and remains) so powerfully **REPULSED** by Him. **Philippians 2:9-10** *“Therefore God exalted*

him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

Have YOU experienced that curious spiritual magnetism in your life? Are you drawn to Jesus? Are you drawn to His cross? Are you drawn to worship Him in humility and faith? Are you drawn to give your lives over to Him and serve Him all your days down here? Are you drawn to love, study, and obey His Word? Are you drawn to take up your own cross daily and follow Him? Are you drawn, even against all our natural inclinations . . . **to embrace DEATH?**

- HIS death on the cross – are you drawn to the darkness of Good Friday?
- The death of your own sinful nature – do you hate it? Are you drawn to kill that wretched part of you that wants nothing to do with Him . . . and wants everything the unbelieving world around us wants?
- Are you drawn even to the day of your own physical death – knowing that the grave is but merely the portal to life everlasting?
- Are you drawn to the great and dreadful Day of Judgment – where we will see the death of everything on this planet / the death of human culture as we know it, the eternal death of all God’s enemies – knowing it will also be the Day of vindication for all God’s people, and the start of a new chapter in a new world – totally at peace with Him and in complete harmony . . . are you drawn to the Day of death that will destroy death forever?

Are you drawn to ALL that? Don’t be too surprised if the answer is . . . *“Well . . . sort of. Maybe a bit . . . I guess.”* For we all have that that fight within us down here. The sinful nature is the polar opposite of the new man / new woman within us. And, like two opposing MAGNETS – they fight each other within us. **Paul** writes in **Galatians 5:17** *“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”*

Only BELIEVERS in Christ know that struggle, for only we have the Holy Spirit pulling us toward Christ / pulling us toward His cross / pulling us toward our own crosses / pulling us toward life through painful death.

Well, here’s a science question for you: *Is it possible to reverse the polarity of a magnet – so that it pulls in the opposite direction?* Yes, it is – if you have the right tools and know what to do. You’ll need a solenoid and electricity, and, by placing the magnet inside the coil – the magnetic field can force a repolarization of the magnet.

By nature we are **all** enemies of Christ and enemies of His CROSS – we are repulsed by it. But – the Holy Spirit can, by His power, change our hearts and make us **drawn to Jesus**. And (amazingly enough) we, His people down here, are part of that work! We – the CHURCH – have those powerful tools, and we know how to use them. We call them the **“Means of Grace”** – the powerful Gospel in God’s Word, and in Holy Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper. When handled and used as God directs – they change and transform hearts / turning people toward Jesus / switching our spiritual polarity.

Those same tools continue to work on us – because part of us always remains unconverted and drawn to sin and unbelief. Our new man / new woman can have our **spiritual magnetism** fade and become less powerful within us. So here we gather around Word and Sacrament – *to let God’s Spirit BLAST us* – showing us how our thoughts, words, and actions are the opposite of what God wants. He forces our eyes away from ourselves and to the CROSS. There we are drawn to His love / His sacrifice / and the peace, forgiveness, and wonderful promises He makes to us. There in His death we find LIFE.

And . . . we beg the world around us to **come and see Jesus!** We expect them to resist, but we know the Gospel is powerful, and we pray that God would draw them in. Doctrine and theology is so deep and marvelous – affecting every aspect of life . . . but it’s also simple enough to show a child. HOLY WEEK is right around the corner – and what a glorious opportunity to tell people what **Easter** really means, and how Jesus died and rose for us all. The mysterious power of the Holy Spirit can change that person’s heart through the Easter message. We know that to be true, for we are living proof – and we are eager and drawn to see Him, listen to Him, and follow Him again through the events of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday! There we see His amazing glory, and in following Him / taking up our own crosses / giving Him our lives and being willing to lay down our lives for others . . . we find glory too – a glory that’s **polar opposite** of what the world is seeking; the GLORY Jesus wants all His people to enjoy.