

A Reading of the Gospel According 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 honour.

'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 judgement 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.

Welcome, to this fifth Sunday in the season of Lent – a season where we especially remember and reflect on the suffering and death of Christ.

Our text today from the Gospel of John takes place in Jerusalem, right after Jesus's triumphant entry, close to the feast of Passover, and in the period leading up to his crucifixion on Good Friday.

Jesus enters Jerusalem and is greeted by a crowd that hails him as the king of Israel. Next, two Greeks – that is two non-Jews, these two gentiles came to the disciples and ask to see Jesus. And they come to Philip, and Philip tells Andrew, together they go to tell Jesus.

We can imagine that they were probably very excited. Things were going well AT THIS POINT. The Jews were receiving Jesus and seem to be hailing him as their king – to such an extent that in **verse 19**, the Pharisees observe what is happening and say "**Look, the world has gone after him.**" And then, as if to confirm the Pharisees' fear, now two Greeks – two gentiles outside of the

nation of Israel – have also come and want to see Jesus. After years of work and public ministry, things really seem to be taking off.

Philip and Andrew come before Jesus, they tell him the exciting news, and his response is to talk about how **“if a grain of wheat is to bear any fruit, it must first die”**, and then to start speaking of his own death.

His response seems cryptic and morbid. You could almost imagine the disciples getting frustrated and wanting to say **“Oh, come on Jesus ... this is good news! ... Why do you have to be such a let-down”!**? Why can't you just be happy about how things are going?"

Although we don't get the disciples' reply, nonetheless it is hard to imagine them not at least thinking this way.

And we often think that way too, don't we? Maybe as we read the Scriptures. Maybe as we hear this very passage. *“Why does Jesus have to be so negative?”* we ask. *“Why so gloomy? Why can't he cheer up!? Why can't he be a bit more optimistic and uplifting?”* That's often what we'd like, isn't? We'd prefer something a bit more positive.

I am not a theologian, or can I truly admit I have read the bible inside and out. But then again, I can guess not many passages have verses like this – not many that say: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** That's not really what we want to hear???

So, in the image of the grain of wheat, in his death and resurrection, Christ reframes our death – so long as our death is in Christ.

This is a direct reference to Jesus own death which would bring many to life including you and me.

12. v25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it... this is a very Lenten theme; we are called to love God ahead of our own lives.

Now, what are the things that get in the way of our devotion to God: booze, food, holidays, family, fashion, watching TV and spending hours on Social Media? Our attention is easily grabbed by the promise of modest benefits. Our ears perk-up to financial plans, career paths, or investment plans that promise an easy and straightforward path to financial prosperity. And we feel that way in many areas of our lives.

We long for a book, or a system, or a guide to parenting that will make our children obedient in a way that is easy and straightforward for us. And when these things don't work out, we get frustrated, and we remind ourselves that we are not asking for that much. All we want is modest fruitfulness in life, achievable in a relatively easy and straightforward way.

Our worldly loves need to be set aside and fully get behind our love for God if we want to hold onto Eternal life.

12 v26 *Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me*

That path is not an easy one. We will fail again and again. But thankfully we have a saviour who can sympathise with our weaknesses. We have a saviour who forgives our sins.

We have a saviour who leads us on, down the path he has forged, as we seek one step at a time to follow in his footprints.

Often in church life, we substitute service for devotion, Jesus wants us to follow him first and serve him as an outcome of that.

But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't just reframe our death. He also reframes our life. We see it in our individual spiritual lives. If you want to see growth in your spiritual life, if you want to see sanctification and maturity increase in yourself, the path will rarely be easy or straightforward. It will almost always be through the path that Jesus paved: the path of death and resurrection. The path of dying to ourselves.

The very idea of a bloody crucifixion sounds brutal and barbarous to some, yet it is the centrepiece of our faith.

In my culture, we don't like to talk about death. Most of us don't like to talk about it or think about it. If I am right, much of our lives and our culture is built around an attempt at the denial of death. It is built to deny to ourselves over and over again that we are going to die.

But death is real, and we need to reflect on it. We need to learn the lesson of the grain of wheat. Death is real and it is difficult. It can be difficult even in Christ, and especially for those left behind. It separates that which was never meant to be separated: body from soul, husband from wife, parent from child siblings from siblings, including other beloved family members and friends.

What is the big deal about the atonement? Why the cross? If we're honest, I think, if we read the dialogue carefully, we're sort of confused by Jesus and we feel some sympathy for the disciples.

Now I will leave you with the following ...Wasn't there any other way for God to save human beings than by sending His Son to die?

AMEN