

John 12.20-33; Jeremiah 31.31-34; Hebrews 5.5-10

Lent 5: 19th March 2021 -10:30am All-Age Zoom Service from St. Andrew's Vicarage, Totteridge

Philip told Andrew, our very own St. Andrew, about some Greeks wanting to see Jesus. Andrew in his usual fashion, brings them straight to Jesus. Here were seekers who were not Jews coming to meet the Saviour. It was an exciting moment. Jesus increases the excitement by saying, 'the hour has come for the Son of Man' to be glorified.' The disciples would see this as the coming of the promised kingdom of God - exciting indeed.

So, his next words came as something of a shock as Jesus started to talk of death. He told them about how troubled his soul was. Like any human being he didn't want to die - He was only 33 years old. He didn't seek out death, he just came to do whatever was the will of the Father.

Today, we turn to look at the passion of Christ in more detail, and this will continue until his death on Good Friday (Devo. Svc. @ 2pm?) For grains of wheat to grow, their burial is necessary. Only by death comes new life. If we hide the grain in a box to keep it safe and secure, it will be useless. Only when it is put in the cold earth can it rise to new life. Only by giving it away to the Earth can we receive a good return.

Often, we seek comfort and safety. We avoid conflict or having to put ourselves out. We look after ourselves. Jesus tells us that anyone who hoards their life or their talent will lose it. But it is no use just surviving; we need to live life to the full. This will involve risk and danger. But of life it can often be said: "use it or lose it."

Bearing in mind what the world did to Jesus, whoever wants to serve him must realise they will not escape from similar troubles. Today, we end with a vision of the future. When Jesus has triumphed over the rulers of this world. "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw more people to myself." Looking back through to millennia, we can see how the cross has drawn all nations to come before him. We come to him who understands our suffering, who has borne our grief and our sins. We come to him who has triumphed over evil and through death, opened to us the way to eternal life.

If we're honest with ourselves, this raises at least two questions for personal reflection. Firstly, how often do we give the wrong impression by suggesting that life becomes less trouble if we follow Jesus? And secondly, can we find ways of lifting Jesus up and drawing others towards him?

Here's a story about a chap who didn't bother to ask himself such questions. Lazy Jack was given a sack of grain. His task was to sow the seed for the village so that they would have a harvest in the autumn. Jack looked at the seed. It was golden and beautiful. He thought it would be a shame to bury it in the ground, when he could so easily keep it for himself, grind a little bit to make flour when he needed it to bake bread, so he took it home and put it in the cupboard. No one knew that he had not sown the seed. Jack just took it easy. It was only later in the year when they were no shoots, no signs of new wheat growing, that the village realised there was something wrong.

Obviously, the seed had not been put in the ground. After a search they found it in Lazy Jack's cupboard. The mice had eaten some, but most of it was still intact. Jack had almost allowed a community to starve by not sowing the seed. Like much in our lives, it was a case of use it or lose it. The villagers put the seed in the ground - it was late for sowing but they trusted in the power within the seed to grow and it did. In the end nothing much was lost and the harvest was good.

Has anyone ever planted seeds in a seed tray or in the garden? Do you know what happens to the seed that is buried? The seed will split open, sending roots into the ground and shoots that will go up through the soil. It will produce leaves to capture air and sunlight to make plant food. When it is fully grown it will produce seeds, lots of seeds, sometimes hundreds, even thousands of seeds. In God's wonderful plan, the seed knows what it is; if you plant the flower seeds, you will not get the seeds growing vegetables. If you plant wheat, you will not get rice growing.

Why do you think Jesus compares himself to a grain of wheat? He would watch seeds being thrown on the ground. He would know that seeds are buried. But he also understood that this is how new growth and new life comes. Jesus was aware as he went towards Jerusalem that there would be trouble ahead. Though he was popular with lots of people, there are others who are jealous, and somewhat angry and others just wanted to stop him. Jesus knew that his big battle against evil was about to begin.

For this reason, he tried to warn his disciples. It must've been very hard for them to understand because he seems so popular. We had to warn them of the danger and the possibility of his being put to death. If this did happen, they had to trust that goodness would still defeat evil, and life will triumph over death. Because it had never happened before, the disciples found it hard to understand when Jesus talked of his resurrection. As Christians, we know something that many people do not. Death is not fatal because it isn't the end, but the beginning of a richer, fuller life. (David Adam)

Did anyone do the grain planting? Mark the spot with a cross?

Find, if you can, from a piece of wholegrain bread, or from a breakfast cereal, a grain of wheat, corn or some other cereal to represent each member of the family. Take them out into the garden, or plant them in a pot, and bury them in the soil. Mark the place with a cross of twigs.

If they are live seeds, they may well sprout in the Spring, but it doesn't matter if they don't. This is just a symbolic act to show how it's only when the purpose of the grain is fulfilled, i.e. when it's given to the earth and buried, that it stands a chance of rising to new life. If we just keep it to ourselves, it doesn't stand a chance!

John 12.20-33

Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

Jesus Speaks about His Death

27 '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. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people* to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Jeremiah 31.31-34 - A New Covenant

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,* says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5.5-10

5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,
'You are my Son,
today I have begotten you';
⁶as he says also in another place,
'You are a priest for ever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.'
7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus* offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.