

Sunday 21st March.

The readings are Jer. 31: 31-34 and John 12: 20 - 33

Readings by Miriam Dotse Jeremiah and Rita John 12

Beginning of Service: https://youtu.be/6_B_Sw_kzpA

“Seeds, Death, and Spiritual Fruit” John 12:20-33

Today is the Passion Sunday, the fifth Sunday in the season of Lent - a season where we especially remember and reflect on the suffering and death of Christ - and so our text for this morning is a familiar Gospel reading for Lent. This passage takes place in Jerusalem, right after Jesus’s triumphal entry, close to the feast of Passover, and in the period leading up to his crucifixion on Good Friday.

If you have a bible you can turn to John 12, or you can listen as **RITA** reads this passage to us.

John 12, starting with verse 20: 20 Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. 21 So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” 22 Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 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. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. 27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Thank you Rita

Our Gospel reading this morning is one of those readings where, I think, if we read the dialogue carefully, we can be sort of confused by Jesus and we may feel some sympathy for the disciples. Things seemed to be going well in the Gospel of John at this point. Jesus enters Jerusalem and is greeted by a crowd that hails him as the king of Israel. Then, two Greeks come to the disciples and ask to see Jesus. They come to Philip, Philip tells Andrew and together they go to tell Jesus.

We can imagine that they were probably very excited. 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, two Greeks - two gentiles outside of the nation of Israel - also come and want to see Jesus. Excited by this, Philip and Andrew come before Jesus, they tell him the exciting news, but his response is to talk about how, if a grain of wheat is to bear any fruit, it must first die, and then he starts speaking of his own death. His response seems cryptic and morbid. And you could almost imagine the disciples getting frustrated and wanting to say “Oh, come on Jesus ... this is good news! ... Why can’t you just be happy about how things are going?” Maybe as we hear this passage we may ask “Why **DOES** Jesus have to be so negative?” “Why so morbid? Why can’t he be a bit more optimistic and uplifting?”

Our attention these days is easily grabbed by the promise of modest benefits in life - fruitfulness, and growth through straightforward and easy progress. People's attention is seized by diets or diet products that promise changes to our bodies through an easy program or that promise of a straightforward path to financial prosperity. Maybe we have hope in a new book, in a new bible reading plan, in a new system, that will rejuvenate and invigorate our spiritual lives in an easy and straightforward manner. When these things don't work out we get frustrated. The disciples were starting to see some fruit in Jesus's ministry. It was going well, it was following a logical, straightforward pattern, and they go to tell Jesus. Why did Jesus have to pour cold water on their hope by starting to talk about death? Jesus's response basically says that Philip and Andrew have lost sight of the scope of God's work, and the way God works in the world. And so, often, do we. What we see in Jesus's reply is that God has much bigger plans than we imagine, and a much different way of bringing about spiritual fruit than we would devise. Let's see how Jesus explains that in our text and how it may be something for us as we move forward in the life of St Francis' Church. Philip and Andrew are excited with a big reception in Jerusalem and two Greeks seeking Jesus. But Jesus knows that this is just the beginning of something much bigger. This is just a hint of what is to come. Jesus knows that God has already promised to do much more than this. When God called Abraham he said to him "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." These two gentiles are barely a taste of what God is doing. Jesus knows this. He says as much in verse 32 when he says "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Jesus knows what God has promised. Philip and Andrew had hopes for Christ's kingdom - they looked to two Greeks who wanted to see Christ but little did they know that the day would come when more people - and an overwhelming number would be gentiles - who would follow Christ than those who lived in the entire Roman Empire of their day. But Jesus knew. Jesus remembered the promise God made to Abraham, and so he kept his sight on the true scope of God's promise. His expectations far exceeded Andrew's and Philip's. Jesus reminds us that God has a much different way of bringing about spiritual fruit. Where we would prefer to achieve things in a relatively easy and straightforward way, Jesus reminds us that God works through death and resurrection, and it is in this way that God brings about spiritual fruit.

Jesus draws this point from the lesson of the grain of wheat. In the grain of wheat, in how God has designed the grain of wheat to work, God has already written a lesson about His kingdom for His people. Jesus sees the pattern for how God works and from this Jesus teaches his followers about God and about his own ministry. He teaches them that his ministry is to be one of death and resurrection. The task given to Christ is an immense one. He is to die for God's people. But in addition to that, he is to extend God's people from a small sub-group in Israel to a level that will bless all families of the earth. And Jesus knows that in God's economy, something like that does not come about in a straightforward way.

If God is to have a great harvest in this world, if it is to extend, to become a harvest that includes all families of the earth, then like the grain of wheat, Jesus knows he must die to produce that harvest. Jesus is trying to change his disciples' mindset so that they can see what is coming. In our text Jesus is showing his ministry in light of that reality - in light of the lesson of the grain of wheat.

When a seed is put into the ground it doesn't technically die, so what does Jesus mean. May be Jesus is getting not at a scientific, literal understanding of the words 'to die' but a symbolic one.

Unless a seed is willing to give up it's shape to be born in to something new it will stay as it is.

Jesus says we must bear fruit. He uses a grain of wheat which the people would be familiar with to give them a picture of what he is going to do for the world and what he is asking his followers to do in return. Jesus was going to lay down his life so that we could be children of God. He was going to die so he could bear fruit and we could reap the benefit of what he has done. Then Jesus asks his followers to do the same thing, to lay down their lives and die to themselves to allow God to make us something greater, to surrender our identity to him so he can take us from being a seed destined to decompose, to being an agent of new life.

The Italian composer Pietro Mascagni (pronounce Mascarni) was once irritated by an organ-grinder who stood outside his apartment playing Mascarni's own composition at about half the correct speed.

Eventually, when Mascarni could no longer stand hearing his composition being butchered in that way, he went into the street and corrected the organ-grinder. He said to the organ-grinder: "I am Mascarni. Let me show you how to play my music correctly."

Mascarni took the handle of the organ, and began to turn the handle more vigorously. This pushed the tempo faster and he said to the organ-grinder this is the way the musical piece should sound.

The following day, Mascarni again heard the organ-grinder in the street outside. When he looked out the window, he noticed a sign on the instrument the organ-grinder was playing, and the sign read: "Pupil of Mascarni." Anyone can **CLAIM** to be a pupil or disciple of a master without actually being one, but true disciples can be spotted by their similarity to their master.

Amen

Show Video https://youtu.be/4KCK6pQ_P6k