

March 29/09 Lent 5B
John 12: 20-33

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Week 5 of Lent and the past weeks have been difficult to handle; all that talk about who we really are, and how we treat others. We have been challenged by God to take a long hard look at ourselves and to peel away the layers we have built up over time to reveal our true selves. I bet some of you are thinking if she preaches another sermon on the atrocities of our world and our behaviour toward others I'm gonna scream! Give us some good news!

Some of us may come away from this experience of Lent these past weeks fairly unscathed. We may have looked deeply into ourselves and recognised we have been faithful, we have been open and honest and followed Jesus obediently through the good and the bad. Others of us may have revealed something different but having seen clearly who we are and have been motivated to change deep within ourselves with the help of God. Still others may have simply listened politely and gone home unchanged in thought and deed.

After all this is what lent is all about; taking the time to learn about ourselves and our relationship to God; Wading through the stuff of our lives, the things that close us up and shut us down. The things that make us numb and put us in a dormant state of being; Stuck in our stuff.

Week 5 is the last of the self-exploration to some degree. Next week we join in the celebration of the triumphant ride of Jesus into Jerusalem. It becomes about Jesus and his path in the next couple of weeks. Thank goodness our part is done. Thank goodness we are ready, hearts open, yearning for Easter when we can live again. But wait, I've missed something, and it begins today. We still have to face death. Before we can live fully we must face death and dying.

This passage has Jesus talking about the death of a seed, a death that really means life. He says, "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."

In week 5 our scripture leads us through an examination of death and the analogy that Jesus uses to teach us about death, his death really, is through the grain of wheat. The use of seeds to teach us things is well established in the gospels. We have heard about the mustard seed, so small and yet grows into a bush that can withstand anything. We have heard about the sower and the seeds that are scattered not only on good soil but on rock and on paths etc. Seeds are a good way to get your point across in ancient times.

Now if John had stopped there we might not be confused, particularly if we do a lot of gardening but our gospel writer goes on, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Is this the proper response to the request of some Greek folks who simply want to meet Jesus? After all, this all started when Philip comes to Jesus with the request of these Greeks to meet Jesus and his response is this, "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." If you were Philip you may have responded with, "Is that a yes or a no?" Neither? And then Jesus goes off on a tangent about seeds. Is this any way to greet new people? Has Jesus gone crazy? Well at the very least he seems a bit preoccupied.

Of course he is preoccupied, he is facing death. The seed dies in order for the plant to live. So what is it that makes this happen? What happens in that darkness of the earth that causes that seed to die? Is it really death or is it life? Is this one of those the glass is half empty half full things? Wouldn't it be better to say that the seed is dead until it is planted and then comes to life as the plant, a living plant? NO, that's not how it works. Have any of you thought about this before? Really? Have you taken the time to sit with a seed and contemplate it?

Generally, I would go to the store, buy a package of seeds, bring them home and as long as they remain in the package or scattered in the drawer they will not grow. Doesn't that make them dead? No, they are simply existing, dormant if you will and not until they die do they blossom and truly live.

So what is it that happens to the seed in the dark, dank, dampness of the earth? What kind of transformation happens in the seeds dying that changes it to become a plant and to produce fruit, or vegetables or flowers or trees? This is the analogy that Jesus is trying to bring to the people. Not until the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies does it bear much fruit.

It is here that we meet Jesus and that we see the true power of God. When the Greeks ask to see Jesus they are not being blown off by Jesus they are being told where to find him by Jesus himself. He is telling them and us to recognise that Jesus will not be seen in the strong and successful, Jesus will be seen in the weak and the poor and those seen as the underbelly of our world; In the dark, dank places.

If you want to follow Jesus you better be ready to get dirty, reverse what you thought to be true, redefine what is valuable to you, and most of all you better be able to go to the cross. The method of death meant to cause shame and instil fear on those who witnessed it. The cross that places Jesus with the lowest in society. We do not have to look far to see the lowest in society. We have people living on the streets in our towns and cities, even in Picton; we know there are people who are abused, addicted, powerless. These people become invisible to us only because we choose not to see them. When we turn away we turn away from the cross and away from Jesus.

If we are the grain of wheat, Jesus is telling us we must fall into the earth. Become part of the darkness, the wet, slimy, worm infested, manure mix that produces the best fruit. Put yourself there. Get into the mud, get into the dirt, face death, yours and Jesus' in order to live and blossom and grow.

Amen