



FIFTH SUNDAY LENT 2006

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 Hebrews 5:7-9 John 12: 20-36

With this story from John, Jesus reaches a turning point in his life and ministry. Some Greeks arrive and ask to meet Jesus. When Jesus hears this he says, "The hour has come..."

Jesus had said he would lay down his life for the flock. He also said that others from outside would seek to join the flock. It seems that interest from the Gentiles pointed to a new development in the journey of Jesus. The problem with this fragment is that it is so brief. We never get to find out if they actually met Jesus. As far as the writer is concerned it gives him an entry to reflect on the passion of Jesus.

The evangelist writes like a poet, every line can be taken and reflected upon. There is no Agony in the Garden narrative in John. Portions of this reflection read as if they belong in such an account.

First, there is the parable of the seed. A grain of wheat must die and be buried before it can reach the next stage of its journey towards fruitfulness. The paradox is how can death be fruitful?

When we experience the death of a loved one, we face the same dilemma that the early Christians faced. The gospel encourages us to live through the apparent loss and wait for the new life that is the natural consequence. In nature it is an ever-turning wheel. In the Christian life the signs are not so obvious. We know from our faith that life continues; we are reborn not into another physical journey, but somehow we are caught up into the Divine in such a way that our personal story continues.

What enables us to live in faith is the reflection on our life journey. We can look back and see little deaths, loss of physical ability, loss of dreams, seemingly dead ends, relationships that have ended, all these little deaths have not been an end, but have led us painfully to a new vision of our life.

Of course it takes a while before we can come to recognise this and during the process we have to cope with anger, pain, and depression that can bring us to the edge of despair. If we allow the dying, the fruit will follow.

We enter the pain of Jesus through the next segment. Jesus says, "Will I ask to be saved from the pain?" This is always our first reaction. "I can't bear it."

Jesus continues, "It is a consequence of my vision and desire to bring your people to a new understanding of your love."

We suffer from the consequences of our own actions and from the actions of others.

There is a lot of processing to go on before we can join Jesus in the final prayer. "Glory to you, O God, who is with us in this."

We then listen attentively for "the voice from the sky" literally, "the daughter of the voice". This is the voice in our heart which brings us to healing.

The final aspect of the story comes with the role the crowd play.

Our journey is ours. Not everyone understands, and some may actively misunderstand. Each time we are able to turn little deaths to fruitfulness, we can contribute more to the healing of the world. It is this healing which will contribute to the banishment of evil. As Jesus was lifted up and drew others with him, so our being raised will draw others with us. This is our mission.

Jeremiah gives us a word of encouragement. There will be a new covenant. It will not be about master and servant, power over, but about mutuality, power with. The new covenant will be written in the heart of all those who accept the call, "I will be their God and they shall be my people. From the least to the greatest they shall know me."

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