

## **Lent 5B**

### **Message: The Lenten Promise of Seeds**

This Sunday is the last Sunday of our Lenten journey. From this point on, we'll experience an acceleration of events that propel us relentlessly towards the cross of Jesus. In a mystical irony, the closer we get to the cross, the slower time will seem to drag.

There is an event recorded in this morning's gospel lesson that, as far as Jesus is concerned, is the trigger for everything that will take place. John records that among those beginning to converge on Jerusalem for the Passover were some Greeks. The people of Israel were extremely ethnocentric, and to some extent justifiably so! They were and are to this day God's chosen people through whom God intends to work his will as through no other nation on earth. For the Jews of Jesus' day, there were only two groups of people: God's people, and everybody else! The terms used for that group of everybody else were the nations, the Gentiles, and, as John writes, the Greeks.

Some of these Greeks, these "others" from the surrounding nations, come to Phillip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus!" Phillip tells Andrew, and together they go and report it to Jesus. Cryptically, Jesus declares, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!" Previously throughout the gospels, especially John, the timing of certain events is described as being delayed because Jesus' "his hour (or his time) had not yet come". Now, apparently, it had arrived! But what was the trigger?

Jesus explains it in this very text. These Gentiles coming to see Jesus represent all the other nations of the earth. Jesus declares that when he is lifted up, he will draw all people – not just the Chosen People of Israel – but all the nations, Jews and Gentiles to himself. The arrival of these foreigners seeking Jesus was to him the sign that The Drawing had commenced.

Jesus was under no delusions or misunderstanding about how this was to happen. The concept of being lifted up from the earth, the idea of being equated with the Serpent on the Pole (last week's scriptures!) clearly proclaimed the method God had elected by which Jesus would die: lifted up from the earth on a cross!

That his death was now imminent is demonstrated in his use of the grain of wheat imagery. Scriptures record a variety of parables in which grain, and more specifically, seeds, are used to describe God's activity in his kingdom. Jesus now employs those images as he seeks to consent to his death and call his disciples to do likewise.

Life in Christ comes to us only as the result of his death and subsequent resurrection. If he refuses to die, we die forever. But his willingness to die, to forfeit his life means eternal life for us.

All this seems too paradoxical for us to grasp, but Jeremiah reminds us that regardless of how bleak things may seem, God will do what he wills! The New Covenant that Jeremiah proclaimed came at a time when it appeared that all was lost. The kingdom was being destroyed, foreign gods appeared to be riding rough-shod over the God of Israel, the temple was gone, and with it, so it seemed were all the promises.

But Jeremiah's prophecy declared a new covenant that seemed counter intuitive. It will be a covenant written on the hearts of the people, God will be to them a husband and they will be his bride, and he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

If there is any doubt as to how this will take place, Jeremiah tells us not just once but no less than seven times in four verses that God himself will bring it about: "I will make a new covenant; I will make, I will put, I will write, I will be, I will forgive, I will remember their sin no more!"

If there is any part for us to play at all in this new covenant, Jesus describes it in reminding us of the role of the seed. The value of seed lies in its promise, not in itself. Seed, while sitting in a jar on a shelf, is essentially worthless. But, as any farmer knows, if you bury that seed in the earth, death unlocks its potential, and the promised is realized...

Once upon a time there was a bag of seed corn...

And the seeds said to the farmer, "We're important! Everything depends on us! Without us, you have nothing! You need to take care of us, attend to our needs, make sure nothing disturbs us! You can't afford to lose a single one of us!"

And so the farmer didn't plant the seeds. He counted each of them carefully and made a special record book that listed each one. To protect them, he put them in special jars with their names on them. He made sure that they did not get covered with dirt and were not exposed to heat of the hot summer sun. He made certain that they did not get soaked with bothersome rains. He isolated and insulated them from everything that might disturb their comfort.

Every year the farmer opened the record book and reviewed the list. Every year the farmer opened up the jars and counted the seeds. He mourned the losses when mice got into one jar and birds another. He carefully wiped off

the jars and arranged them neatly on the shelf. He made sure they were comfortable. And the seeds were happy and satisfied. After all they were important! You must have seeds. Seeds are life! Without seeds you'll have nothing!

As the number of seeds declined over the years, the seeds complained to the farmer, "You're not doing enough! You're not protecting us! Take care! Take care! We are the seeds! We are important! It's about us! Without us you'll have nothing!" So the farmer doubled his efforts in protecting the seeds. And every year he did not plant there was no harvest. One year the land owner returned and asked the farmer, "Why is there no grain in your bins?" And the farmer replied, "I've been taking care of the seeds! They are important, you know! Seeds are life...without them I have nothing." And the land owner walked away, shaking his head.

The continued counterintuitive irony is that the call for disciples of Jesus, seeds of promise, is to be willing to let go of our lives for the sake of a harvest for the kingdom; to care more about those who are not yet here among us than for those who are already here!

Thanks be to God!