

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021
LENT 5B
JOHN 12:20-33
TRADITIONAL

THEY CAME WITH A SIMPLE REQUEST. THEY HAD HEARD THE RUMORS ABOUT HOW THIS JESUS HAD RECENTLY RAISED A MAN FROM DEATH TO LIFE. THEY HAD BEEN IN THERE ON PALM SUNDAY WHEN THROGS OF PEOPLE USHERED JESUS INTO THE CITY. ON MONDAY, THEY HAD HEARD HOW JESUS WENT INTO THE TEMPLE AND TOSSED OUT ALL THE GREEDY, MONEYGRUBBING TRADERS, WHO WERE MAKING THE PLACE OF WORSHIP LOOK MORE LIKE INDIAN MOUND MALL THAN A HOUSE OF PRAYER. NOW IT WAS TUESDAY, AND THESE GREEK TRAVELERS CAME TO PHILIP, ONE OF THE LORD'S DISCIPLES WHO HAPPENED ALSO TO HAVE A GREEK NAME LIKE THEIRS. SOMEONE THEY THOUGHT MIGHT GIVE THEM AN "IN." THEIR REQUEST WAS SIMPLE. **"WE WANT TO SEE JESUS."** NOT JUST SEE HIM FROM A DISTANCE BUT TALK WITH HIM. FIND OUT WHAT MAKES HIM TICK. DISCOVER WHAT HE'S ALL ABOUT, AND WHY EVERYONE IS SO EXCITED ABOUT HIM. **"WE WANT TO SEE JESUS."** ISN'T THAT WHY YOU'VE COME THIS MORNING?

I PUT A STICKY NOTE LIKE THAT UP HERE ON THE PULPIT AS A REMINDER FOR MYSELF SO THAT NO MATTER WHAT ELSE IS SAID IN THE SERMON, I GET TO THE MOST IMPORTANT THING. **"WE WANT TO SEE JESUS."** I HAVE A SIGN LIKE THAT FOR THE FRONT OF THE PULPIT FACING YOU (TAPES IT ON) YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO HAVE THE PREACHER SHOW THEM JESUS. AND THE PREACHER SHOULD EXPECT TO SEE JESUS – HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER – INCREASINGLY VISIBLE IN THE LIVES OF THOSE GATHERED FOR WORSHIP. VISIBLE, NOT JUST IN SOME QUIET, SECRET WAY, FOR EACH OTHER. BUT CLEARLY VISIBLE IN AN ATTRACTIVE WAY FOR EVERYONE... GREEKS AND GROVE CITIANS, AS WELL AS THOSE FROM OBETZ AND GROVEPORT, AND ALL OVER!

"WE WANT TO SEE JESUS." THAT'S WHAT THE GREEKS SAY TO PHILLIP. AND

PHILLIP IS CAUGHT OFF GUARD BECAUSE JESUS IS BUSY AND BECAUSE GREEKS AND JEWS DON'T MINGLE MUCH AND PHILLIP REMEMBERS JESUS SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT HIS MISSION BEING PRIMARILY TO THE LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL. WHAT TO DO?

CHECK IT OUT WITH ANDREW. MAKE ROOM FOR THESE GUYS OR NOT? STILL NOT SURE. TOGETHER, THEY GO TO THE LORD HIMSELF. WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO BRING THEM TO THIS POINT? IN THE REST OF THE GOSPELS, JESUS MAKES CLEAR THAT HIS PRIMARY MISSION WAS EXCLUSIVELY TO ISRAEL AND TO REVEAL HIMSELF AS THE MESSIAH. BUT NOW HIS MINISTRY IN ISRAEL IS COMPLETE. SUDDENLY PEOPLE "NOT WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL SHEEPFOLD OF ISRAEL" ARE COMING TO HIM.

HIS ANSWER IS SOMEWHAT CRYPTIC. HE DOESN'T SAY "YES" OR "NO." HE SAYS **NOW IS THE TIME FOR GLORY. HIS GLORY.** AND THEN THIS... ***"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."***

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? THE SEED WAS JESUS' LIFE, WHICH THE AUTHORITIES WERE SEEKING TO TAKE FROM HIM. AND HE HAD A CHOICE TO MAKE. HE COULD RUN. HE COULD TONE DOWN HIS MESSAGE. HE COULD SAVE HIMSELF AND LOSE HIS LEGACY, OR HE COULD LOSE HIS LIFE IN ORDER TO MAKE ONE. BUT THIS IS HIS RESPONSE TO THOSE WHO WANT TO SEE HIM, TO THOSE GREEKS, TO YOU, TO ME. IF WE WANT TO SEE JESUS, WE MUST DIE.

AND YOU KNOW, THAT DYING IS ABOUT MORE THAN PHYSICAL DEATH. YES, IT IS THAT, BUT ALSO SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT. WE DIE A THOUSAND DEATHS IN OUR LIFETIME. THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE, A RELATIONSHIP, HEALTH, OPPORTUNITIES, A DREAM – ALL DEATHS WE DIDN'T WANT OR ASK FOR. AND THEN THERE ARE THOSE TIMES WE CHOOSE OUR LOSSES AND DEATHS. WE GIVE UP PARTS OF OURSELVES FOR ANOTHER. WE REALIGN OUR BELIEFS AND VALUES SO THAT WE CAN BE MORE AUTHENTIC PEOPLE. AND SOMETIMES THERE ARE THINGS WE CLING TO THAT DENY US THE FULLNESS OF LIFE WE WANT AND THAT GOD OFFERS. THINGS LIKE FEAR, ANGER AND RESENTMENT, REGRET AND

DISAPPOINTMENT, GUILT, THE NEED TO BE RIGHT ALL THE TIME, APPROVAL.

WANTING TO SEE JESUS ISN'T JUST A SPECTATOR SPORT. IT IS A VERY CLEAR WAY TO BE FOLLOWED, AND TRUTH TO BE EMBRACED, A LIFE TO BE LIVED TO ITS FULLEST MEASURE. IT'S BEING A GRAIN OF WHEAT THAT FALLS INTO THE GROUND SO THAT IT MIGHT BEAR MUCH FRUIT. THAT'S WHERE WE SEE JESUS MOST CLEARLY. IT'S IN THE LETTING GO, THE EMPTYING, THE LEAVING BEHIND, AND THE DYING THAT MAKES SPACE FOR NEW LIFE TO ARISE.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES IN MY LIFE WHEN I LOOK BACK AND SAY, " I NEVER WANT TO GO THROUGH THAT AGAIN." AND YET SOME OF THOSE SAME TIMES ARE ONES I WOULDN'T TRADE FOR ANYTHING. WHY?

AS DIFFICULT OR PAINFUL AS THOSE TIMES MAY HAVE BEEN, THEY BORE MUCH FRUIT. I WAS CHANGED AND MY LIFE WAS RENEWED. IT WAS A "GRAIN OF WHEAT, DYING TIME". IT WAS A TIME WHEN I KNEW I HAD SEEN JESUS, WHEN I HAD EXPERIENCED THE HOLY, WHEN I WAS ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT GOD WAS PRESENT AND WORKING IN MY LIFE.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN LOOKING BACK IS THAT LETTING GO IS WHAT ALLOWS ME TO MAKE ROOM FOR NEW LIFE AND A NEW WAY OF BEING PRESENT TO GOD IN MY LIFE. AND MY LETTING GO GIVES GOD SOMETHING WITH WHICH TO WORK.

SEE, THE SECRET TO LIFE, LIES IN DEATH. THIS SECRET, THIS PATTERN OF LOSS AND RENEWAL OVER AND AGAIN, WILL BE UNVEILED EVERY DAY THROUGHOUT HOLY WEEK. I THINK THAT'S WHY THIS TEXT IS BEFORE US TODAY, A WEEK BEFORE PALM SUNDAY AND THE START OF HOLY WEEK. IT'S OUR PREPARATION FOR THIS IMPORTANT TIME IN THE LIFE OF OUR FAITH. AND YOU KNOW WHERE HOLY WEEK ENDS, RIGHT? AT EASTER , AT THE EMPTY TOMB, AT THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY AND THE RENEWAL OF LIFE. THE SINGLE GRAIN OF WHEAT HAS BECOME THE BREAD OF LIFE.

NOW YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T PLANT A SEED AND GO BACK IN TEN MINUTES OR

THE NEXT DAY AND SEE A NEW SPROUT. GROWTH IS SLOW AND DELIBERATE AND THE FRUIT OF NEW LIFE TAKES TIME – ALMOST ALWAYS LONGER THAN WE WANT IT TO. YET, EVEN WHEN UNSEEN, UNBELIEVED OR UNRECOGNIZED, THE POWER AND LIFE OF GOD ARE PRESENT AT WORK IN THE VERY DARKEST AND HIDDEN PLACES OF OUR LIVES. THAT'S THE MYSTERY OF NEW LIFE.

NOTE THAT JESUS DID NOT ASK TO BE SAVED FROM DEATH. HE IS UNWILLING TO SETTLE FOR SURVIVAL WHEN THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S LIFE IS BEFORE HIM. HE KNOWS THAT IN GOD'S WORLD, STRENGTH IS FOUND IN WEAKNESS, VICTORY LOOKS LIKE DEFEAT, AND LIFE IS BORN OF DEATH. THIS IS WHAT ALLOWED HIM TO RIDE TRIUMPHANTLY INTO JERUSALEM, THE PLACE WHERE HE WOULD BE CONDEMNED AND KILLED. IT'S ALSO WHAT ALLOWS YOU AND I TO RIDE TRIUMPHANTLY THROUGH LIFE, BECAUSE WE UNDERSTAND THAT DYING TO SELF, THAT DEATH ITSELF IS A GATEWAY TO NEW LIFE. IT IS A NEW BEGINNING, NOT THE END.

SEE, REGARDLESS OF WHAT OR WHO IN OUR LIFE HAS DIED, GOD, THROUGH JESUS HAS ALREADY CLEARED THE WAY FORWARD. WE HAVE A PATH TO FOLLOW, AND THAT PATH IS THE DEATH OF JESUS, WHERE WE ARE GIVEN THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF DYING, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. ULTIMATELY, DEATH, IN WHATEVER WAY IT COMES TO US, MEANS THAT WE ENTRUST ALL THAT WE ARE AND ALL THAT WE HAVE TO GOD. WE LET OURSELVES BE LIFTED UP AS HE DRAWS US TO HIMSELF.

WHILE JESUS LIFE IN THIS WORLD WAS SIGNIFICANT, IT WAS RATHER SMALL AND FLEETING COMPARED TO THE ETERNAL LEGACY OF SALVATION HE WOULD LEAVE BEHIND THROUGH HIS DEATH. IN HIS LIFE, JESUS TOUCHED THOUSANDS. IN HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, JESUS HAS TOUCHED MILLIONS OVER THE CENTURIES, INCLUDING YOU AND ME. THE WORLD MEASURES A LIFE IN TERMS OF YEARS, AND WHAT IS GAINED IN THE HERE AND NOW. JESUS MEASURES A LIFE BY THE LEGACY IT LEAVES BEHIND. WHAT IS THE LEGACY OF YOUR LIFE WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE?