

The holy gospel according to St. John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here we are on the fifth Sunday in Lent – this is the last Sunday before Holy week begins. We have reached a turning point in John’s gospel – this teaching comes just after Jesus has made his “triumphal” entry into Jerusalem. This will be Jesus’ final public teaching – and soon - he will gather the disciples to be with them and teach them in private. The crowds are continuing to gather around him – and opposition from the religious authorities is nearing its height. Uniquely in John’s gospel, the people gathered around Jesus are still celebrating the raising of Lazarus - and Jesus’ miracle of bringing a man back from the dead who had been decomposing in a tomb for four days. Jesus’ proclamation, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” carries the full authority of his power over death - even as he himself, moves resolutely toward his own. Jesus’ death brings to a close the work that the Father has sent the Son to do - and it is only through his death and resurrection that glorification will come.

Our text this morning prepares us for Holy Week by keeping us squarely focused on the message of the cross. In it, we repeatedly hear the theme of endings and beginnings – “death and resurrection” if you will. With the arrival of the Greeks in Jerusalem who go to Philip saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” the “world” has come to see Jesus – he is no longer just a “small town” preacher; this is the end of his public ministry and the beginning of his private ministry to the disciples; there are no more miracles to be performed - Jesus’ hour has finally come - and through the cross, the message of the gospel will no longer be just for the Jews – but for the world as well.

Just after he announces his hour has come, Jesus 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” - which is of course a metaphor for his own death and resurrection. It is also a metaphor for the life of discipleship. Now despite the fact that I have never had a green thumb – or much interest in gardening – even I can embrace the wonder and mystery of how such a small and insignificant thing – described as dead in the ground by Jesus, can be reborn into an abundant head of wheat. A seed – or grain in this case - must be placed in the soil in order to germinate and grow into a new plant or stalk of

wheat that will in turn yield many more. This image correlates with Jesus' impending death and introduces the irony in God's plan of salvation - life does not end with death – but in fact - emerges by way of death. Jesus' crucifixion cannot be understood apart from his resurrection – the message of the gospel is both death and life. If death and resurrection are the self-giving path of Jesus - so too will they be for his followers.

Jesus continues by saying, “Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” These are words we have also heard in this season of Lent from Mark's gospel. So, what does “losing our lives” and “death and resurrection” look like for us today? If Jesus is the example -, especially as we see him in John's gospel, his life is a life lived in obedience to his Father. He has lived to do the will of his father - leaving nothing and no one behind in fulfilling God's mission to save the world. Jesus' constant surrender of his will to the Father's - captured verbatim in “not my will but your will be done” - is the example and constant prayer for Jesus' followers who are called to relinquish the life that the world offers them, in order to gain life that is everlasting – the abundant life given by God. That is where the divine life breaks in. When we cling too tightly to our lives – when we see our lives and the choices we make as “personal possessions” – we lose them. But when we let go of our lives - that is when we enter into new life with Christ and the life that God promises us.

Jesus reveals a God who triumphs through suffering and wins victories through defeat - our victories and triumphs may come the same way. There are the obvious moments of suffering in life – the unexpected loss of a loved one, losing a job, being diagnosed with a terminal disease. There are also the self-inflicted moments of pain and suffering – the ones that come from our pride and selfishness. Jesus' truth contradicts the accepted practices and norms of this world. Our reading ends with an almost ghostly announcement-, “Jesus said this to indicate what kind of death he was to die.” The gospel is not an escape hatch from our temporal afflictions. The gospel announces that God is not only acquainted with our suffering - but that God promises to be right there with us all the way. All the way from death to new life. All the way from the rejection of the world - the hate-filled speech and abuse - the demoralizing stare - the cursed spit - even when our beloved

friends have abandoned us ... there we see Jesus and the glory of God shining through.

Peter will be the one to say, “even if all become deserters I will not” - but we know how quickly he forgot his vow. Jesus stays with us - to and through death. The gospel says that surely, if we have been united in him with a death like his - we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. The one who triumphs through suffering and wins victory through defeat has joined his life to ours - and there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can break that union. There is nothing in all creation that will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Pastor and President of the International Bonhoeffer Society, Dr. Gaylon Barker, says that “The cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian are the same. Our goal is to be shaped into the entire form of the incarnate, crucified, and risen one. [Like the grain of wheat falling into the soil that it may grow and bear much fruit,] new life in Christ does not take [us] out of the world – but places [us] right back in it. Discipleship then, is both a confession of faith and a call to action.”

Jesus dies to give life to the world - and in doing so - he draws the world and all people – to himself. As his followers - we continue to bear the cross in the world - lifting up the Lord with the full vision of God’s glory – to proclaim what Christ has done and is doing in the world - calling and drawing all people to himself to witness his love and receive the grace that his cross bestows.

The death he dies to sin, he dies once and for all - that we might live in his Easter promise of an eternal love that conquers death for you, for me, for the world... Amen.