

## 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015 - Wesley Uniting 9am Service - Lent 5

Theme: 'New life in Christ'

Text: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12: 24

### Introduction

Here we are entering the last full week of Lent before the short week, Holy Week, leading up to Easter. Next Sunday is Palm or Passion Sunday and we have just those last few days before Good Friday. Are we ready for Easter and particularly the significance of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday? I'm not sure that I feel prepared for this Easter period and I'm not sure why. We have had almost a quarter of the year disappear in a flash and Easter is almost upon us and I don't feel ready, spiritually, for this time of the year. However in John 12:20-33 Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to happen and it is good for us to reflect on this passage today in preparation, spiritually, for Easter.

### John 12:20-33

Our reading today is set in the last week of Jesus' earthly life. He has been inadvertently anointed by Mary with wonderful perfume, which in hindsight is seen as preparation for his death, and he has triumphantly entered Jerusalem as the city prepared for the celebration of the Passover. This populist acceptance soon turns to ridicule and the call for crucifixion. The section of Scripture we have today begins curiously with Greeks seeking to talk to Jesus. This is most unusual and hence we have what appears a strange beginning to the passage where initially they approach Philip and he checks it out with Andrew before they both go and tell Jesus. Jesus' response appears to be one where he ignores the Greeks, or at least we have no account of him actually meeting with them. What does happen is that Jesus teaches the two disciples (presumably the others heard his teaching also) about the fact that he is to be 'glorified' which was a term that encompassed not purely his death on the cross but also his resurrection. The 'glorified' covers the various aspects of the Easter events and here, yet again, he prepares his disciples.

While Jesus appears to ignore the Greek delegation it must have been important to many to be included here and these 'seekers' may well be behind Jesus' words in verse 32 "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Also, the early Greek converts were important and to have this approach to Jesus, here in John, was important for the early Christians in Greece.

Jesus' teaching is again initially in parable form:

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Verse 24

Jesus then goes on to explain the parable:

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Verse 25

This seems a bit harsh for us today, but remember this is in the context of a parable. That is a story with a specific meaning or point that Jesus is trying to make. Jesus is saying here that to simply concentrate on yourself, forgetting others and God, is destructive and literally soul-destroying. Lifting your eyes, seeing the needs of others and looking at the work of God on and through the cross will change you completely and lift you beyond self-absorption. The 'hate' expressed here, which is an incredibly strong word, is for those who have no recognition of who Jesus is and the work of God. It is a world alienated from God.

“Whoever serves me .....my Father will honour....” (sections of verse 26). Here is what is important and not the ways of the world.

Then there is a sudden shift in Jesus’ words and he personalises his own struggle with what is required of him.

“Now my heart is troubled and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No it is for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!” verses 27 & 28a Here we have the summation of Jesus’ ministry and his faithfulness to God’s mission in Him. Yes there will be personal pain but through it God is glorified and God’s mission to all people made clear in the cross of Christ. He has accepted both the mission and the consequences of what he has been called to.

It is at this point that we have:

“Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it , and will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said an angel had spoken to him. Verses 28b-29

Here Jesus’ ministry is confirmed and some understood and others didn’t.

### As we come towards Easter what can we learn from this passage?

1. There will be a variety of people ‘seeking after Jesus’ for whatever reason. Sometimes we can be a conduit to Jesus, but sometimes, for a variety of reasons, this doesn’t happen and we shouldn’t beat ourselves up about it but simply leave it in the hands of our Lord. We may never know what impact we have on the lives of others.
2. We live in a very self-centred and self-absorbed, introspective society here in Australia. The way of the world is to look simply after number one, ourselves, and even as a congregation we can fall into this trap. However, this passage challenges us to look beyond ourselves to the world around us and see the needs, both spiritually and physically, in God’s creation. By lifting our eyes to the cross, we take them off ourselves and see the pain of others in the light of God’s love revealed in the cross. Suddenly we become like the kernel of grain, dying to self, to bring forth so much more into God’s world as we follow Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.
3. In this Lenten journey with Jesus, we are called to bring our worship to God – to glorify God. For in doing this we are affirming God’s love for us, God’s amazing work on our behalf through the life/death/resurrection of Jesus and the call to follow him and honour God.

As I struggled with some aspects of this passage, the strong image that came through to me was not to get ‘bogged down’ with the ‘nitty gritty’ of the mundane things of life, but to remember to lift our eyes to the cross of Christ that reveals the great love of God for all of us, even, and maybe especially, when we are struggling with some aspects of our own lives or those close to us. For me, this gave me a little peace as I come towards a fairly busy Easter.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, as we follow you, as we walk towards your cross, we marvel at the depth of your love for us. Fill us with wonder as we gaze upon you as you are lifted up for us. Even more, cause us to marvel at your love for all of us and for everyone. Amen.