

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: John 12:20-33

"Be Planted to Grow"

One thing is certainly evident – Jesus never kept the fact that He had to give Himself as a sacrifice and die in order for us to live! You can read each of the Gospels to see Jesus' own words, time and time again, as evidence of His prediction of His death. One of the greatest examples was after He asked His apostles "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter responded that "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Right after this Jesus said that He was about to go and give of Himself in Jerusalem – the Apostles still were not getting it.

In today's Holy Gospel according to John, Jesus is met by His Apostles Andrew and Philip, who tell him that there are some Greeks, some foreigners, who are interested in learning more about Israel's God and the Jewish festivals that celebrated His deeds in the past and His promises for the future. They specifically asked to see Jesus.

Instead of telling them to bring these Greeks to Him – Jesus starts talking to them about seeds and plants, about life and death, and about servants and masters. You can just imagine Andrew and Philip saying "huh?" They asked to come and see you? He is getting to the point that His life will soon be sacrificed as the sacrificial Lamb. Please open your pew Bibles to page 1672 and look at verse 32 at the end of today's Holy Gospel. Jesus says, "*and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.*" (John 12:32) Jesus is speaking about all people, making this available for all believers – Jews and Christians - with the offer to all of mankind. The invitation is for everyone who draws breath. In other words, if the Greeks want to see Him, if they want to benefit fully from what Jesus has been sent into the world to do – He first has to complete the work that God the Father has given Him. You see, only by Jesus going to the cross, dying and rising again will the non-Jewish world – who at that time who mostly spoke Greek, would not just see Him – they would truly come to Him, believe in Him, calling Him Master and Lord, being drawn by the powerful love of God and into fellowship and new life.

Jesus' speaking about His death will be like sowing a seed into the ground in order for the true purpose of the seed to be filled. I know a lot of those present today have worked with seeds. It will for all intents and purposes appear to be a tragedy, but it is in fact a remarkable triumph – the triumph of God's self-giving love, the love that looks death right in the face – looks evil right in the face and defeats it by meeting it voluntarily; not just for the people of Israel – but for the whole world – the world represented by the Greeks.

Jesus had spoken a few times before this that His time had not yet come – but here we see Jesus saying that the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. That time was drawing very near – and with these Greeks coming and asking to see Him was a sign very much like the first blooms of spring. The great moment of love and liberation for the world is very near! If they really want to see Him, and to get to know what He is all about, then they must be ready to be planted in the same way – to risk everything for His service and kingdom! It took the Apostles quite a while to get the message – remember, many of them ran when Jesus was

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arrested and it was not until the Day of Pentecost when God gave them the boldness to speak the truth, to go out into the world, and for the most part – die for the Lord.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:3-5 *"don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."* I do not know about you – but that brings me great hope. I have said this many times - that in order for us to have Easter Sunday – there has to be a Good Friday. In order for Jesus to rise from the dead and give us hope of Resurrection – Jesus had to go to the cross willingly and die for us. There has to be a sacrifice – the sacrifice that was done once for all mankind. We celebrate that but then we celebrate something even greater with the resurrection on Easter Sunday. Christians used to explain that they were *"dying with Christ"* in Baptism and Faith. Jesus said in verse 26 on page 1672, *"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."*

For God to move – we need to move, by faith. We need to put our life in “the ground of faith.” I have heard it said that “if you want to see God laugh, tell Him what your plans are” because His plans just might not line up with yours. Whoever would have thought that we would have faced this past year. It was so traditional for us to come to church every Sunday. We were hunkered down at home from March 15th until May 31st, and some even after that. I thank God that we had Communion on the porch so you could come and get Holy Communion – this was a year like nobody had ever experienced. Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday were totally recorded online and came up at 10:30 AM. Over 500 people joined us each of those Sundays by watching our service online – from all over the world. I do not think we can fit 500 people in here – we might be able to get a little over 100. Think of the people, the souls, the hearts that were touched because of your faithfulness. Because of the Vestry standing by and allowing us to continue to do that. My Goodness! For nearly nine years, when we were up in Tonawanda New York, I asked God “how do you want me to serve you today?” And I felt He was telling me to keep doing what I was doing. And then, “where? I always got the sense that I was to be right where I was. It was until June of 2014 when He said, “be ready.” I went OK! And then, I got the call from Bishop Neil asking me to consider this church in Douglas, GA. Of course, you know my first question was, “where is Douglas, GA?” He told me, “about 2 hours north of Jacksonville.” I said. “Bishop Neil, that is good enough for me.” How do you want me to serve today, and where? That is not just a question for priests, that is a question everybody could and should be asking Each one of us has ideas of what we think is best, or the way we think things should work. “Me, myself and I” – that is the greatest roadblock for God to move and make a difference in my life.

When we are stubborn, we think we win, but in fact we have lost everything. Unless we die to our flesh, it profits nothing: Jesus said, *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."* (John 6:63)

And so we need to decide whether we obey the Holy Spirit and be united with God and His will - or will the flesh yield to the body and all the temptations of this material world. In Genesis, when man fell, mankind resisted the Holy Spirit's authority and became enslaved to the body and all of its passions. And so humanity became driven by the flesh, not the spiritual. Mankind's spirit was denied its rightful position and was reduced to be a prisoner of the flesh – and all of the pain, hardships and sicknesses, the pandemics, that went along with it.

When you accept Jesus Christ into your life, you receive the seed of the Holy Spirit. I just love the hymn that we just sang – “Breathe on me breath of God”. The Hebrew word for breath – is ruach. The Hebrew word for Spirit is – guess what – ruach. The Ruach Ha Kadesh is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Breath – the breath of life. You receive the seed that only the Holy Spirit can break open to become strong, like an oak tree in your life. As a Christian, if you are a slave to sin, it then becomes a slavery by your own choice. You do not have to be a slave if you allow the spiritual principles of God to work in your life. But the direction of your life will depend on whether you are living under the authority and law of the flesh or the authority and law of the Holy Spirit. My brothers and sisters – it is far better to die to self and be planted for Christ!

For me – The Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 2:20 says it all – *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* There are two ways that we can live: we can live a life of obedience, or a life of disobedience. But as Christians, we owe our flesh nothing. Your flesh has not done a thing for you. The Apostle Paul said you are not obligated to the flesh; you are obligated to the Holy Spirit.