

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2015 Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

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

Scripture: John 12:20-33

“Sowing the Seed”

When we examine the purpose of Jesus' earthly life it becomes clear that Jesus had to die so that we could live...just as we have to die so He can live through us and others can have life as well. It seems painful, but very true. The way we look at things and what the Word of God says is sometimes completely opposite.

The evidence is right there for us: Jesus says that if I want to:

... save my life... ...I must lose my life – Luke 9:24-26

... be lifted up... ... I need to humble myself before the Lord – James 4:7

... be the greatest... ... I need to be a servant – Matthew 20:20-22

... be first... ... I need to be last – Matthew 19:30

... rule... ... I need to serve – Luke 22:26-27

... live... ... I need to put to death the deeds of the body – Romans 8:13

... be strong... ... I need to be weak – 2 Corinthians 11:30; 12:9-10

It is just like a farmer who is sowing seed - if he keeps the seed out of the ground all he has is seed. But when that seed is planted and it grows - there is an incredible transformation – and not one that we have much control over. If we ever start to think that we are the one who grows the seed we have another thing coming, because it is the Holy Spirit – it is God Himself that breaks open the kernel and brings forth life. To put it another way - If you bury it - it rises. Doesn't that sound a lot like resurrection? That means dying to self, dying to your own agenda, and giving all of yourself to Jesus. It's time to give up and give in to the Lord. Jesus says: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”* (Mark 8:34)

In today's Holy Gospel according to John, Jesus is met by our beloved Andrew and Philip who tell him that there are some Greeks, foreigners, who are interested in Israel's God and the Jewish festivals that celebrated His deeds in the past and His promises for the future. Instead of telling Andrew and Philip to bring them to Him – Jesus starts talking to them about seeds and plants, about life and death, and about servants and masters. A real key to what Jesus is getting at comes right at the end of today's Gospel passage, when Jesus says *“when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.”* (John 12:32) All men, not just Anglicans, or Baptists, or Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, all men – 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 the Father has given Him. Only by Jesus going to the cross, dying and rising again will the non-Jewish world – mostly at that time who spoke Greek, wouldn't just see Him – they would come to Him, being drawn by the powerful love of God and into fellowship and new life.

Jesus' death will be like sowing a seed into the ground. 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 several times before this that His time had not yet come – but here we see, what were Jesus' words – “the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. His time is drawing very near – and these Greeks coming to Him and asking to see Him is sign very much

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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, to get to know what He is all about for themselves then they must be ready to be planted in the same way – to risk all for His service and kingdom! It took the Apostles a while for them to get it – many of them ran when Jesus was arrested. It wasn't until the Day of Pentecost when they were given 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 don't know about you – but that brings me great hope. You see in order for there to have Easter Sunday – there has to be a Good Friday. There has to be a sacrifice – the sacrifice that was done once for all mankind. We celebrate that but then we celebrate and even greater resurrection on Easter Sunday. Christians used to explain "*dying with Christ*" in Baptism and Faith. Jesus said "*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*" (John 12:26)

For God to move – we need to move, by faith. We need to put our life in “the ground of faith.” **“If you want to see God laugh, tell Him your plans!”** I had no idea last year at this time that I would be in Georgia. I am so grateful. We don't know what God's plans are for us – and so each day we need to ask God – how do you want me to serve, and where? 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've 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 make a decision. 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 the 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 mankind became driven by the flesh, not the spiritual. In other words, man's spirit was denied its rightful position and was reduced to a prisoner of the flesh – and all of the pain, hardships and sickness that went along with it.

We have been given a gift with which to fight the flesh – God's Holy Word. The law of the Spirit and the law of the flesh are not equal in power. Jesus said “*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” (Matthew 26:41). In Romans 8:2, the Apostle Paul wrote “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*” That is why Christ went to the cross – to stare evil, sin and death in the face and defeat them- on our behalf.

Has anyone here today ever seen an acorn move a sidewalk? Can it break it up because it has fallen in the crack of the sidewalk? An acorn cannot do that, but when you allow the acorn to be what it was created to be, you no longer have an acorn, you have an oak tree and when an oak tree begins to grow, it can move concrete because it far exceeds the law of concrete. When you accept Jesus Christ into your life, you receive the so-called acorn of the Holy Spirit who

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wants to become like the oak tree in your life and move aside the concrete problems of your life. As a Christian, if you are a slave to sin, it then becomes slavery by your own choice. You don't have to be a slave if you allow the spiritual principles of God loose - 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. The once dead and useful for nothing acorn was planted and then literally moved earth. My brothers and sisters – it is far better to die to self and be planted for Christ!

For me - 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 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 hasn't done a thing for you. St. Paul said you are not obligated to the flesh; you are obligated to the Spirit.

Most believers want to serve God and give him their all. But somehow, being human, we all manage to fall short. (Romans 3:23) *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

- The spirit is willing – that is, the heart, the desire is there, but the flesh is weak – the ability to get it done falls short.
- The spirit is willing, but the flesh gets in the way.
- The spirit is willing, but the flesh sometimes can be very lazy.
- The spirit is willing, but the flesh makes excuses. Flesh and spirit struggle for control of all of us.

We must base everything we do on the reproof of God's Word. If you are led by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God will always lead according to the Word of God. Sometimes God's way, the right way is the hardest way. It takes effort – a whole lot of effort. It always goes against the flesh. The flesh has to be crucified. My dear friends, I encourage you to follow the Holy Spirit. Know the Word of God. Let it guide your every thought and action. God has laid it out in black and white – and some with red letters - for us to see and follow. On Wednesday nights we have spoken about the term “B.I.B.L.E.” which can mean “basic instructions before leaving earth!” God wrote it. Jesus lived it as our example. Trust Jesus to be your sower – let Him “plant you” and watch the transformation that can only come through Him!