

Year B Lent 5 Passion Sunday

Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Hebrews 5:5-10, John 12: 20-33

Last week Nick was talking about compassion, or suffering with, and today is known as Passion Sunday. In other words, we are now in the run up to Jesus' suffering on the cross, in the run up to his death and then his resurrection. Jesus' time has indeed now come. Up until this moment Jesus had steadfastly maintained that his time had not yet come, but now it has.

Yet this week's Gospel is a slightly odd passage in many ways. An unspecified number of Greeks come to Philip and say they want to see Jesus. It's not clear whether they were actually Greek, or whether that was another way of saying they were Gentiles, or, as some commentators believe, they were Jews living in Greece. And we are not told whether they actually ever got to clap their eyes on Jesus, or indeed why they wanted to 'see' Jesus. Were they like Nicodemus, seeking spiritual insight, or wanting to see Jesus because they'd heard he was the latest craze about town, or even just wanting to pick a fight? We just don't know

And if it was for genuine reasons, which Jesus did they want to see – the healer, the teacher, the peacemaker, the comforter or indeed another Jesus? The same can be asked of us, because we too seek a different Jesus at different times as our moods and circumstances change and as our level of faith ebbs and flows. At times even seeing Jesus at all seems hard. At times we are so familiar with the Easter story that we can almost forget that God actually chose to die on the cross, precisely so that he could draw **ALL** people to himself, especially the abandoned, the lost, the persecuted. Out of love he chose to be the scapegoat, the sacrifice. In the way that only Jesus could he turned an instrument of torture and death into an invitation into abundance, into new growth, into new life.

So to see Jesus, we have to be willing to look at the Cross, because it was on the cross that he revealed who he really is. He showed that God is love, and not only that, he showed us that God's love is steadfast. Jesus longs to see each one of us, in fact he longs to see us much more than we long to see him. We only love because God loved us first.

In John's Gospel Jesus likens himself to a lot of different things to describe himself – bread of life, Lamb of God, the light of the world, a door, the good shepherd, the way, the truth and the life, the true vine, the resurrection and

the life. And in this passage we have another one, Jesus likens himself to a grain of wheat that has to die to produce a bumper harvest.

We could just take Jesus describing himself as a grain of wheat as yet another metaphor, but of course we are now in the early days of spring with signs of new life emerging all around us, so I think it's worth looking at this passage in terms of the vegetal life cycle. And it made sense for Jesus to describe himself in the way he did because he lived in a fundamentally agricultural society and what he was saying would have made perfect sense to his audience, certainly in the literal sense

The keen gardeners among us know that most plants and shrubs have a very clear cycle, growth in the spring, blossoming in the summer, decay in the autumn and lying dormant in winter, looking dead to all intents and purposes before starting the cycle all over again. And the same is true for crops and fruit.

So, the vegetal cycle teaches us about resurrection. Death and decay are not the end. Once the snowdrops and daffodils have displayed their glory, they disappear from sight and mind. But it is in their dying back that they proliferate and re-emerge from the darkness in even greater profusion. Later in this chapter Jesus promises that those who believe in him will not remain in the darkness

Losing our life for the sake of the Gospel leads to everlasting life. Just as plants germinate again after lying dormant, so having faith in God leads us into a life that bears eternal fruit.

When Jesus died he had a handful of followers. Now, 2000 years later there are an estimated 2 billion followers. That's some harvest and it's increasing all the time, even if it doesn't always feel like it, especially to us in Europe. But that doesn't mean we can't be a fruitful grain of wheat. In the Gospel reading Jesus says that anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. I don't think Jesus meant hate in the sense that it has come to mean to so many people, rather I think he is talking about rejecting the world's values of materialism of consumerism, of me first, of success – however that's measured whether by fame or money – of ignoring the suffering around us. When we turn our backs on those values and adopt kingdom values, that's when we will be like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and produces a harvest.