

Palm Sunday A, 2011

Text: John 12:20-43

Title: Grain of Wheat

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In the Name of Jesus.

This Lent we have been looking at Jesus, listening to the call of the Gradual, "Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus."

We've looked at Jesus from every angle.

We've seen dozens of portraits of Him.

Some of the pictures have been familiar and comforting. Others have been new and exciting. Some have been difficult and challenging.

With each picture there has been a dark side, one part of the picture that is not happy or pleasant. In each picture there has been a cross.

Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, but He had to endure the cross and its shame before He was seated at God's right hand.

Jesus is the Son of God, but He was forsaken and abandoned by His heavenly Father as He hung on the cross.

Jesus is the bread of life, but that bread was broken on the cross before it was given to you.

Jesus is the Savior, your rescuer, but He dies on the cross in the process of setting you free.

Jesus is the door, the gate to the Father, but just as the veil in the temple was torn to make a way in, so Jesus' body was torn on the cross to give you access to the Father.

Jesus is the living water, and He promises that he who comes to Him will never thirst. But on the cross Jesus Himself cries out, "I thirst."

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus is the light of the world, but while Jesus hangs on the cross there is three hours of darkness.

Jesus is the way, but His road takes Him along the Via Dolorosa, the way of suffering all the way to the cross.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life, but on the cross He gives up that life.

Jesus is the true vine, but He is cut deeply on the cross in order to graft in the new branches.

In every picture, there is a dark side. In every picture there is the cross.

Even today, on Palm Sunday, it looks like the greatest, most glorious picture of all, but there is still the cross looming in the background.

Today, on Palm Sunday, everyone wants to see Jesus. After He raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus is a celebrity.

As Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem, the crowd welcomes Him with shouts of praise and with palm branches. They call Jesus their king.

Even folks from Greece come looking to see Jesus.

This is a great and glorious picture. It is the picture of Jesus that His disciples have been waiting to see- Jesus, the King, riding into town triumphant.

But the picture quickly fades. It doesn't last long.

In moments Jesus reveals what the true picture looks like. He is not a glorious king, but a single grain of wheat.

That's the picture that Jesus wants His disciples to see- the grain of wheat.

A grain of wheat is simple, ordinary and small. Nothing too remarkable.

But when it dies and is planted in the ground, that single grain grows and bears fruit.

This is what will happen with Jesus. In five days He will be lifted on the cross and die, and then be planted in the ground.

The crowds don't like this picture. They can't understand it. They can't picture a dead Christ, a dead Messiah. They don't see any glory in death. They don't want to see any crosses in their picture of Jesus.

For the crowd, glory comes from power. They loved having positions of power in the synagogues. This is man's glory. Death is to be avoided at all costs, especially death on a cross. To those people, Jesus hides Himself.

You are tempted with man's glory, too. Human glory comes from wealth, power and authority. It comes from putting yourself and your life first. It comes from avoiding pain and suffering at all costs. This is what the world tells you to do- love your life and put yourself first.

God's glory is the exact opposite. Jesus says, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

St. Paul expresses this thought in our epistle reading from Philippians 2, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

That is what your life looks like in this world- suffering, death and the cross. This is actually the main picture for you- suffering, death and the cross. Yes, there will be times of joy and happiness for you, but through it all there will be times of suffering. The cross is in your picture, too.

If you seek to avoid suffering in this life, you will find it in the next.

But if you suffer with Jesus in this life, you will live with Him in the next.

That’s the glorious promise that comes at the end of the week with Easter on the horizon. Suffering and death will not have the last word. Jesus did not remain in the tomb. And that is true for you, too.

Jesus promises, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.” If we follow Jesus to the cross, we will also follow Him to the empty tomb.

He burst forth triumphant, like a stalk of grain bursting through the ground, coming back to life. That is what gives us hope in the midst of our suffering.

John Crumm, an Anglican priest, wrote an Easter hymn that paints this picture for us:

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love Whom we had slain,
Thinking that He’d never wake to life again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Up He sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for three days in the grave had lain;
Up from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the grain of wheat that was buried, and has sprung up again.