

Fifth Sunday in Lent March 17, 2024

Introduction to themes for the day and the season: We might be tempted to jump right over this Fifth Sunday in Lent to Holy Week. Add to that temptation the fact that today's Gospel reading takes in events AFTER he and his followers have processed with palms into Jerusalem. His following grows, Lazarus has been raised from the dead and religious leaders have ordered Jesus arrest. Jesus' declaration of his death hints at something beyond his single human life time-Resurrection and God's intention to reconcile everything and everyone.

Gospel: John 12:20-33

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. 27"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

A Commentary in lieu of the sermon:

We begin by noting the chain of events leading to Jesus' declaration of his pending death:

Chapter 11:1-44-Lazarus is raised from the dead,

Chapter 11:45-54 some come to trust Jesus, religious leaders convene a council fearing that Jesus will destabilize everything and attract so much unwanted attention that the Romans will destroy the temple and the nation (spoiler, the Romans do just that). The council plots Jesus' death

Chapter 11:55-58-Passover is near and people travel to Jerusalem. People are looking to meet Jesus, who isn't there just now. The religious leaders ordered that anyone knowing Jesus' whereabouts should give him up for arrest.

Chapter 12:1-11 -six days before Passover at Bethany, Mary anoints him with costly oil...an anticipation of his death. Some chief priests also plan to have Lazarus killed because his being raised from the dead has caused many to seek Jesus and perhaps to trust in him ("believe", John says).

Chapter 12:12-19 Jesus and a great body of pilgrims meet Jesus and form a procession into the city shouting "Hosanna" (Lord Save us). The reaction among some Pharisees is "why, all the world has gone after him".

The words of these leaders provides the introduction to the Gospel reading today where "Greeks" *meaning anyone in the known world who isn't part of the Jewish people want to meet Jesus and his reply is to speak about the grain of wheat dying and bearing fruit.

Things to ponder:

What if Jesus likens his earthly life to the seed...what might that mean as the "seed dies" and then bears fruit? I think about Jesus' appearances after the resurrection as I ponder this question. What more fruit might Jesus be speaking of?

Jesus says his intention is to draw all people to himself:

-What does drawing people to himself even mean? John does talk about belief as something way beyond agreeing with someone's interpretation of the facts...believing is a trusting, depending, evolving relationship with someone.

—does all mean all? If not what does that say about Jesus accomplishing what he sets out to do?

-Is there a word for the church? Is there necessity for things to die before new life comes about? In light of the church's waning presence in the world (at least as we experienced church in the last 100 years or so) are there things dying that are the 'seeds' that become more?

what becomes of seeds that never germinate?