

## Grain of Wheat

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Lent 5: John 12:20-33

<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very 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. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

<sup>27</sup>“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. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

*In using the analogy of a grain of wheat, Jesus was indicating what they would see on the cross. Only His body dying, but the fruit of His death was the certainty He had in prevailing over the world’s dark powers: sin and death. When we give up our personal ambitions to be used by God, then we bring God glory and ourselves our greatest pleasure.*

It was my Dad who taught me about gardening. Each spring, when I’m putting my flowers in the ground, I still hear his voice and see his strong hands teaching me the steps. Whether it was planting corn or beans or squash or pansies the procedure was generally the same. Make your row or hole in the dirt. Stick the seed or plant in the ground. Gently push it down. Water with fertilizer. Cover with more dirt. Now more firmly pack it down again. Water more. Wait and watch.

Jesus was such a good teacher in that He used analogies from people’s daily existence. “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.” As an agrarian society, ancient peoples understood this. Farmers throw the seed into the dark earth, which was like a tomb. There, the seed died to its form of being a seed, then it would break open, sprout roots and evolve into another form...wheat seedlings with a head, stem, leaves and roots. Dying in one form to live in another form. From seed to plant to fruit. A seed dying to itself, to become something else.

Why does Jesus talk like this? He knows that the ‘hour has come.’ He has reached the intersection of His life, where He must fix His eyes on the cross. God the Father is leading Him there.

Jesus is describing first of all what it will mean for Him to die on the cross. His body will be hanging there. Head, feet, hands, body bloodied from the torture. But it will only be the form of His body. Only the seed. With His body broken open, His death will produce much fruit, overcoming and prevailing against all the darkness of the world: sin, death, the devil.

He has His own fears. Jesus is fighting His very human desire to avoid being killed. He knows the right thing to do and yet doesn’t want to do it. “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’?”

There was a female comedian who was telling her experience of childbirth. She said all through her pregnancy and even on the way to the hospital, she somehow thought a substitute would suddenly arrive and actually do the painful work of childbirth for her. Right? Who willingly wants to be in all that pain? Remember Jesus was fully human. He says, ‘What shall I say, Father, save me from this hour’? Jesus was troubled in mind and heart and spirit. There was good reason to want to skip what was coming next.

But in being fully divine, Jesus also understood that in giving up His life, He would be saving ours. So He bravely continues, obedient to His life’s purpose. “No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” The great service His death will bring to all of humankind, the seed and form of His body dying on the cross would bring glory to God. The love with which Jesus loved everyone (the previously dead, those currently living, and us) would fill people with praise and thanksgiving to God. His death would sprout to bear fruit in the empty tomb. For generations after, God hears our humble praise each time we encounter death.

What does this mean for you and me? To again think about it metaphorically, how are we the grain of wheat that Jesus calls to die? It’s something the church has known for centuries. There is an old famous phrase: “The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.” (Barclay. *The Gospel of John*, Vol.2. Westminster. Philadelphia, PA. 1956. Pg 143.) Incredible men and women have been prepared to die so that something greater would come from their death. Think of Joan of Arc (French heroine and Catholic) who prayed, “I shall only last a year, use me as you can.” Think of Alexey Navalny, who was a Christian, giving his life in the hope that Russians

might one day be free. When we learn how to bury our personal ambitions, we throw ourselves under the dirt. Then God can begin to really use our lives.

Now what God calls us to grow into isn't always fun. Do we liked being moved around or challenged beyond what we believe our capabilities? Is it easy to leave family and friends far behind? For those who are called to forget personal safety each time they answer the call; they sacrifice things many of us don't understand.

On Friday night as our group of high schoolers visited Longview, the fire and police stations, we heard stories from people who live this life. There was a theme: emergencies don't follow a 9-5 schedule. One of the firemen said, "The most challenging piece is the time away from my family." One of the dispatchers said, "Sure it messes up my sleep. But I love my job. I wouldn't do anything else."

Frederick Buechner once wrote, "The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." (Buechner. *Wishful Thinking; a Seeker's ABC*. Harper One. 1993)

That brothers and sisters, is the calling of your life and my life. Our seed shells of pride, personal success, always being in control of every outcome, or our selfish gain get broken open with the loving moisture of God. Then we begin truly living! Not staying on the sidelines. God makes us put down roots where God needs us to sprout and grow. God's will for us becomes our will, our desire, our greatest joy!

Think of people you know who have unselfishly, in the name of God, created cures, or been an incredible professor, have become an astronaut, or was the very best custodian possible. In the face of incredible personal challenges, they have allowed God to use the seed of their life to bear great fruit for the world around them and for God's glory. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." (Mark 8:35)

There was one time that I planted Forget-me-Not seeds. I did it just like Dad taught me. But they lived up to their name and forgot to sprout and bloom.

May we not be like those Forget-me-Nots. May we- with God's help - choose to allow God to break open the seeds of our lives, to not stay safely under the dirt, but instead reach for the sky, grow into everything God created us to be, giving thanks to Jesus for showing us the way, and finally and always...giving God the glory. Amen!