



THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

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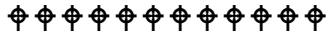
March 21, 2021

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray

I speak to you in the name of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Today's readings help us to recognise that JESUS chose to suffer and give up His life for us.

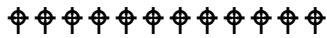
Jeremiah's is a prophecy of new covenant – ^verse 31 says: "31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Judah needed reassurance. Jeremiah's message was not generally one of encouragement. He lived and prophesied at a time of national spiritual decline. The nation had failed and Jeremiah, often called the "weeping prophet", told GOD's people that they would be taken into exile. This did not make Jeremiah popular. He did, however, deliver this remarkable prophecy of a new covenant. It will be different, he says, from what their ancestors had

experienced when they were led out of Egypt. Previously the emphasis of the covenant had been national. This new covenant would be with them as individuals – ^as in Ezekiel 34: 25-27 - ²⁵ I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. ²⁶I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them. The nation had failed and now GOD would focus on an individual response and renewal of heart. No one need depend upon others for instruction. Potentially all people would have a knowledge of GOD and it would not be merely a matter of external obedience but would be written on their hearts. In case

they are concerned at the loss of the Temple sacrifices, Jeremiah reassures them that forgiveness of their sins will come as an integral part of this new covenant.

Our Gospel for today records the moment when JESUS knows that, in fulfilment of the promised new covenant, He must give up His own life and He does so willingly. He knows there are no covenants and no release of new life unless a seed falls into the ground and dies. ^Verse 24 of our Gospel passage says: 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. The time has come for JESUS to be glorified. Last week we talked about JESUS being “lifted up” – Moses raising the bronze serpent on a rod to cure the people from snake bite and JESUS being raised up on the cross – being glorified. It crosses JESUS’ mind that He could ask to be saved from this. His response to this thought is: 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. JESUS' calling is to seal the new covenant with His own sacrifice – a moment of glory.



The Gospel today proclaims the paradoxical wisdom of emptying in order to become full – of dying so that we may be raised to new life. This is the “hour of radical obedience and exaltation for which, from Cana – where JESUS changed the water into wine – through controversies, festivals, and miraculous signs, JESUS has been waiting – an hour that in today’s gospel sees JESUS sought by new “first disciples,” those beyond Israel – to whom John refers to as “some Greeks.” They were probably Greek-speaking Jews who had come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

They approach Andrew and Philip, 2 of JESUS’ original disciples who are apparently approachable and good at bringing others to JESUS. Although these seekers may have been Jews from far-flung places, John uses this episode on the threshold of JESUS’ “hour” to suggest the

call of the Gentiles. Many nations who eagerly seek JESUS will be drawn into his mystery when He is lifted up from the earth on a cross; all those who will belong to the church that is meant to be multiracial and multicultural.

To explain the meaning of his "hour", JESUS tells the parable of a grain of wheat. When it is dropped into the earth, the seed shrinks, empties itself and dies. But in the warmth and moisture of the earth, new life breaks out of the husk and bears much fruit. "Fruit" in John's Gospel means "life" – and the hour is at hand when JESUS will be buried in the heart of the earth and rise from there to transformed and transforming life.

The larger world beyond Israel now includes us. If we wish not only to see but also to follow JESUS, we must choose to empty ourselves of self-centredness, of the instinct for self-preservation at the expense of others. Those insulated from others' suffering, eager for good connections, popularity, and status – rather than finding

and following JESUS – will lose their lives. From seeds buried in the warm love and service of others, and watered by fidelity to our baptismal commitment, the Christian community grows into the mystery of the death and resurrection of JESUS. This is not easy; it was painful for JESUS, and it is painful for us. JESUS' soul was troubled, we hear, but He embraces His hour of His own free will. He has already told the crowds, "No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father". What JESUS has done, He proclaims, has always been for the glory of His Father, and He will die because of the way He lived. The Father's voice affirms JESUS' proclamation – declaring that JESUS is giving glory to GOD; and will be glorified because of this. It is a voice, says JESUS that speaks not so much to reassure JESUS Himself, but to bring faith and encouragement to bystanders.

We are now the crowd gathered around JESUS. Do we understand His words or the Father's voice? Can we recognise His saving cross at the epicentre of the tragedies that are born of sin, planted on the seismic fault lines that threaten to open and crack our world apart: the divides between rich and poor, peace and violence, north and south, east and west? Even more important, can we allow ourselves to be drawn into the exalted cross of CHRIST so that we ourselves may offer from the "right place" of the cross the fruit of healing reconciliation for the glory of GOD?



As He did in last week's gospel, JESUS once again reveals that He must be "lifted up." In speaking to Nicodemus, JESUS said "The Son of Man must be 'lifted up' so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life." In today's Gospel He proclaims: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." Even though JESUS' body will eventually be "lifted up" on a cross – a tool of torture and death, in John's Gospel the crucifixion

is the moment of JESUS' complete glorification. Each day we draw closer to the holiest days of our year when we live in a particular way JESUS' passion, death, and resurrection. Let us also prepare ourselves to give glory to our crucified and risen LORD who draws everyone to Himself.

Just as JESUS shared His troubled heart with 2 of His disciples, so we can share our feelings with others. Like JESUS we can also cry out "Father save me from this hour." *Yet not my will but Your will be done.* Our good GOD will save us – probably not by solving our problems – but by helping us to hear the cries of others who need us, and the cries of those who are less fortunate than we are. Remarkably, responding to their needs will bring healing peace to our life as well.



May we pray:

O saving CHRIST, you obeyed your Father in everything and were raised up for the salvation of the world. May we follow you in everything, rejecting what is evil and

holding fast to all that leads to life with you – who live and reign with GOD the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one GOD for ever and ever. Amen.

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