

# The hour has come

17 March 2024 – Lent 5

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Do you know what these are? **Seeds!**

What will these seeds grow into? **Plants!**

Do you know what sort of plant? ... **beans** ...

But what if we just left the seeds in this bag here ... would they grow into new plants then? Why not? ... what else is needed? **Soil, water, sun** ...

In our Bible story today, Jesus says that what happened at Easter when he was killed and then came back to new life is a bit like planting a seed in the ground that started to grow.

Do you know what the seed of Jesus grew into? **The church!** That's right, people like us, all following the loving way of Jesus.

## BIBLE READINGS

We listen for the word of the Lord.

**Our ears and hearts are open.**

### ***Jeremiah 31:31-34***

'The days are coming,' declares the Lord,

    'when I will make a new covenant

with the people of Israel

    and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant

    I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand

    to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,

    though I was a husband to them,'

declares the Lord.

'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel

    after that time,' declares the Lord.

'I will put my law in their minds

    and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.  
No longer will they teach their neighbour,  
or say to one another, "Know the Lord,"  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,'  
declares the Lord.

### ***John 12:20-33***

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Passover festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!'

Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

For the word of God in Scripture,  
for the word of God among us,  
for the word of God within us  
**thanks be to God.**

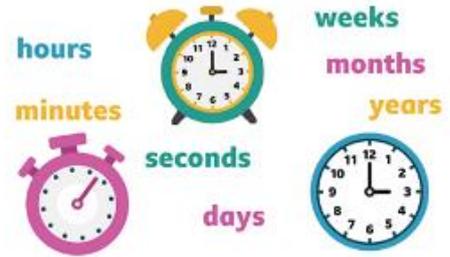
## MESSAGE

Not all time is the same. What do I mean by that?

Mostly when we think of time, we think of clock time – seconds and minutes and hours and days.

So our service this morning started at 10 am.

The service will go on for about one hour, give or take a few minutes.



Western culture is quite organised around this clock or chronos time in Greek. Other cultures have a more fluid concept of time.



So last Sunday afternoon, for instance, a small choir of church members and friends were invited to sing at an Interfaith concert. The concert was scheduled to start at 4 and finish

at 6.30. As it turned out, the schedule was fairly relaxed and the concert didn't start till around 4.15 and didn't finish till nearly 8 o'clock.

But there is another type of time altogether that is captured by the word *kairos* in Greek, which might be translated as the right time, or the favourable time or the God given time. It's the sense that now is the right time ... to downsize your house, or to go on that long dreamed about trip or have that difficult conversation that you've been putting off.



A week or so back I was sitting with Jean James and her daughter Carol. Jean's health had been declining for weeks but it was clear on this morning that she was really struggling to breathe and that her time on this earth was drawing to an end. Jean died peacefully two hours later. After a long and adventurous life, Jean's time had come.

In today's Gospel reading from John, it is this second type of time, *kairos* time, that is in view. Jesus highlights this by saying 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. This is a turning point in the Gospel of John. Jesus' public ministry of teaching and healing is ending and he will shortly withdraw to spend time with the disciples before facing the cross. But he has a few more words to share before embarking on the next stage of his journey.

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This pivot or hinge in John's story is instigated by Jesus' booming popularity. Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover festival and the temple authorities and Pharisees are completely unnerved by the crowds' enthusiastic support of Jesus.

News about Jesus has even reached occasional visitors to Jerusalem – some Greeks – who wish to see Jesus.

This brings full circle the invitation in the opening chapter of John to the very first followers of Jesus to 'come and see'.

Now, it seems, everyone wants to see Jesus.



John doesn't tell us if these people ever did get to speak to Jesus – as Philip confers with Andrew who then confers with Jesus ... It sounds as if these people may have received the first century equivalent of our modern day call centres: your inquiry is important to us ... please stay on the line ... you have progressed in the queue ...

Whenever Jesus' popularity threatens to swamp his mission, he often moves elsewhere or sharpens the edge of his teaching, especially in the Gospel of John. Do you **really** want to be my disciples and follow me? Let me tell you how it's going to be ...

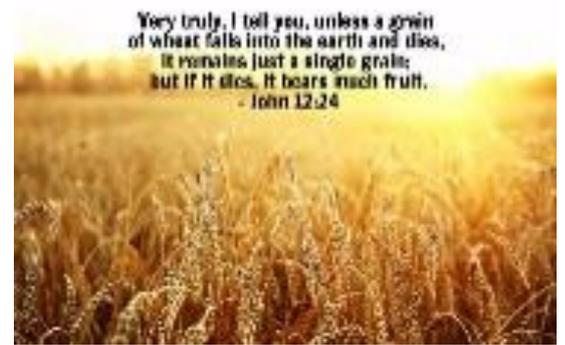
So after the feeding of the 5000, for instance, when the crowds regard Jesus as a prophet like Moses – providing food for the people to eat in the wilderness – Jesus turns most of them away by saying bluntly that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life. John is probably pointing ahead here to the later sacrament of Communion, but the words are shocking enough to drive away most potential followers.

In today's passage, Jesus again offers hard teaching that will repel many. Those who love their life will lose it but those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.



Jesus also uses the analogy of a seed to illustrate his point. This seems to be John's equivalent to the parable of the sower where the farmer scatters seed, some of which falls into good soil and produces a large crop.

Here Jesus takes the perspective of the seed and talks about the seed needing to die in order to produce many seeds. Coming at this point in the story, it seems reasonable to infer that Jesus is pointing ahead to his own death and burial in the ground that will end up in resurrection and new life for many.



A seed has potential for life, but if it stays in a bag in the farmer's shed it remains just a seed. Only when it's planted in the ground will it transform into new life and produce many seeds. It is those who are willing to give up their life and be transformed – like Jesus – who will produce a rich harvest.

Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador wrote this in 1979, a year before he was killed while presiding at Mass:

To each one of us Christ is saying: If you want your life and mission to be fruitful like mine, do as I. Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried. Let yourself die. Do not be afraid. Those who shun suffering will remain alone. No one is more alone than the selfish. But if you give your life out of love for others, as I give mine for all, you will reap a great harvest. You will have the deepest satisfactions. Do not fear death or threats; the Lord goes with you.

Perhaps most of us are not prepared to go as far as Oscar Romero, but I wonder how much of Jesus we actually want to see and hear ... Are we prepared to sit with him and learn this hard teaching? Because the longer we sit with Jesus, the more we will see that his ways are wild and subversive and demanding, just as they are deeply attractive, all at the same time. While we may delight in his inclusive love and compassion for others, I wonder for myself, for instance, how far am I prepared to go in embracing this self-giving way of living and service that at times will feel like death?

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The next part of John's story repackages some key moments from Matthew, Mark and Luke and presents them in a new light. When we hear the words ...

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*My soul is troubled. What should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour?'*

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... which other story might we hear echoes of?

These words seem to reflect Jesus' anguished prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, where he prays for God to remove the cup of suffering he is about to face.



Here in John's Gospel, though, there is no apparent struggle, no sweating drops of blood, but rather just a calm acceptance that his death on the cross is an integral part of his mission ... it's the very reason he has come to this hour, to this God-given moment in time.

Then when we hear the words ...

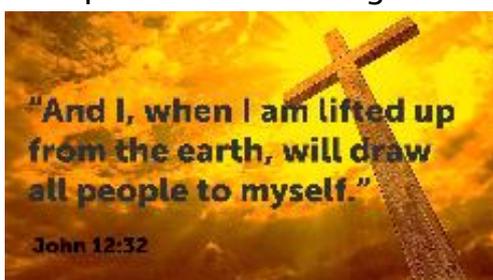
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*'Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice spoke from heaven 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there said it was thunder.*

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... I suspect we are meant to hear echoes of which other story?

... the Transfiguration story where Jesus' glory is revealed and his identity affirmed by God's voice that speaks from a cloud. Something similar happens here - as Jesus now turns towards his passion - but the audience is no longer just three chosen disciples but the whole crowd in Jerusalem, who seem just as confused as the three disciples in the Transfiguration story.



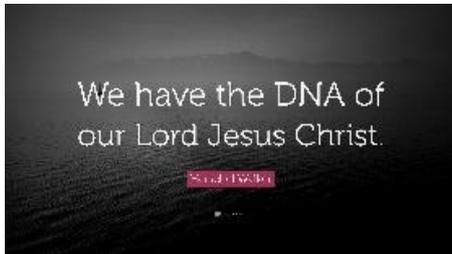
Jesus goes on to say that when he is lifted up on the cross he will draw all people to himself. For the writer John, the cross is not a tragic or unjust or random ending to Jesus' life, but rather the place where Jesus the Messiah is glorified and enthroned as King, an event that will draw people to Jesus rather than repel them.

Perhaps John is able to write these words with the wisdom of hindsight, but it does make us pause and ponder again the meaning of the cross.

Is it a symbol of human violence, hatred and cruelty, or does John want us to see it as a symbol of love and fruitful life that comes through death?

How we hold these two ideas together might be something we want to ponder this Easter.

I want to offer a couple of further thoughts on the image of the seed from earlier. A seed contains all that's needed for a new plant to grow – all the energy, all the DNA, all the potential. It just needs the right conditions of soil and water and light to grow and thrive and bring forth new life.



We are some of the fruit that came from the seed of Jesus.

Our lives incorporate some of the same DNA as Jesus' life – love and compassion for others, forgiveness, grace, faith in God.

As our lives are held in God's grasp and watered by the God's Spirit, the seeds of Jesus that have been planted in our lives will grow and reflect more of this life-giving DNA of Jesus. As we give ourselves to serve others, we become fruitful and this same DNA is passed on and built into the lives of others.

The apostle Paul calls this the fruit of the Spirit growing in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – character traits growing in our life that reflect the character of God.

The earlier reading from Jeremiah about God's Law being written on our hearts and coming to know the heart of God is giving a similar message.

So one of the most powerful ways that we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus is by nurturing the seed planted in our hearts, the light of God that Jesus brought into the world, which with the Spirit's tender love brings forth new life and a rich harvest.

## **LENT CANDLE LITURGY**

On this fifth Sunday of Lent,  
we remember that Jesus wrestled with  
and embraced the call to costly discipleship.

**We too are called to receive our vocation in Christ  
and assume the mantle of compassion.**

As we extinguish this candle  
**we accept receiving the discipline of the cross,  
which enables God's peace to come into the world.**