

Jeremiah 31.31-34

Hebrews 5.5-10

John 12.20 - 33

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. John 12.24

At the start of a PCC meeting we always spent the first ten minutes looking at a Bible passage, and last Wednesday, we looked at the first part of this morning's gospel reading. Of course, if you were a seed analyst, like Pam Butler, our church warden, the short parable about the grain of wheat would catch your attention. So Pam and her neighbour in the PCC meeting commented on what it may mean for a grain of wheat to die – and how it ends up bearing fruit, ie. growing from the seed into an ear of wheat. And thinking about this, we realise that the seed does, of course not really die, but it needs certain conditions to enable it to sprout and become what it is meant to become. This will require for the seed to be placed in the ground, in the dark, where it will rest/wait until the conditions of moisture, temperature and light are such that it can stir into life. And as part of this process it will be broken open and changed. What looked like a 'dead' thing becomes a living, growing thing. We have to slightly suspend our modern scientific minds as we know the seed doesn't really die. The point is, it will remain lifeless and dead – a single grain, unless it is prepared to enter the ground and undergo change.

Jesus uses this small parable to point to his own impending death and resurrection. He is in Jerusalem a few days before the Passover festival, and the crowds have greeted him with shouts of Hosanna, welcoming him as the king of Israel. And in this crowd are Greeks who have come to worship at the festival, who will have observed all the commotion around Jesus and made enquiries. They decide to ask one of his disciples 'we want to see Jesus'. In John's gospel – 'to see' means a lot more than meeting Jesus and having a chat. 'To see' is to understand Jesus' true meaning and to believe in him.

The Greek's question is the trigger for Jesus' announcement 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. But he needs everyone to understand that this glorification involves him being put to death, being laid in a grave and rising again. For, it is his death and resurrection that open up the way to life for his followers.

Vs 25 Those who love their life lose it and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me. Like Jesus, like the grain, we too, must be prepared to die. We will have heard this many times in our lives as Christians, but it's hard to actually take it on board. When it comes to the crunch, we would rather not do any dying.

The Greek language –in which John's gospel was originally written -has different words for life, and they are used in this morning's gospel – and this is really important!

Those who love their life (gr. *psyche*) lose it and those who hate their life (gr *psyche*) in this world will keep it for eternal life (*zo-ë*) **zo-e** is the life that Jesus offers – life to the full ; **zo-e** is what our calling as Christians is about – it's the life that is from God; life filled with the Holy Spirit.

The life we are asked to loose 'psyche' is our physical life and life according to the values of this world – which includes being greedy - for wealth, for success, for power, for recognition. It's what drives us- for example, wanting to be liked, to be admired and to seek status. Often, we aren't really aware of what our internal drivers are until something goes wrong. This also includes seeking to be the best spiritual person, the best theologian – if we seek to enlarge our ego, our own self-importance, it is a way of life that does not bring us closer to God; it's life that we need to let go off.

Returning to our parable of the grain – the life we love, 'psyche', our self, our ego, is the seed - which has all the potential in it to bear good fruit. It's us with all our gifts and talents and our desire to be good and holy. But unless we are prepared to die – to let go of our attachments and delusions, for example, our self-image which may be based on being clever, or pretty, or hard-working, or liked by people around us – whatever it is that gives us security and identity – unless we are prepared 'to let go and let God' – as one of our lent preachers put it, we are clinging on to life in this world, preventing 'zo-e' to grow in us.

But, this dying is always painful. It involves letting go of parts of ourselves or attachments to things or even people that feel so important to us. And we don't like having to change. Often, it's events that happen to us – something in life does not go to plan that requires us to trust, change and grow. It maybe the experience of failing in an exam and having to realise that this is not the most important thing in the world; it may involve not getting the promotion we wanted; it may mean losing one's job, becoming ill and needing the help of others, it may mean having a bereavement – and, it may also mean standing up for one's faith and being ridiculed . Of course, there are many in

this, our own day and age, who are physically suffering and dying because of their faith. And then, there will be our physical death – where our life in this world will end – we don't know how or when – our death will be the ultimate invitation to let go – and to receive eternal life – zoe- life from/with God.

Dying is not easy, and it was not easy for Jesus.

And whilst Jesus knew his death was inevitable and he needed to face it, he, like most human beings went through the agony of having to face a violent, pre-mature death. His announcement that his hour to be glorified has come, is followed by his admission that his soul (the gr word is 'psyche' again) is troubled. Jesus, too, was afraid, terrified of having to die.

In the gospels of Mark, Matthew and John, we find him in agony praying in the garden of Gethsemane – Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me, yet, not what I want; but what you want. Jesus chose life 'zo-ë' – not for himself but for humankind, for all of us. And Jesus, who knows how hard this assures his followers of his presence and has given himself to us in the bread and the wine –food for the journey, food to keep us in eternal life 'zo-e'.)

Today is the beginning of Passiontide – in our journey through Lent we start to focus more deeply on Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. Next Sunday, Palm Sunday is the start of Holy Week – the most important week in the Christian Year. The shape of the special services from Palm Sunday to Easter Day enable us to become part of those events nearly two-thousand years ago; we journey with Jesus praying that through him and with him we are open to letting some dying happen in ourselves, some letting go — that zoë – our life in God/with God may grow – that like the seed of grain, we may bear much fruit – and become who God created us to be. Amen.