

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

March 21, 2021 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, Year B)  
John 12:20-33

A man had been driving all night and by morning, was still far from his destination. So he decided to stop at the next city he came to, and park somewhere where it was quiet, so he could get an hour or two of sleep before he hit the road again. As luck would have it, the QUIET place he chose happened to be on one of the city's major jogging routes.

No sooner had he settled back for a snooze when there came a knock on his window. He looked out and saw a jogger running in place. "Yes?" he said.

"Excuse me, sir," the jogger, said, "do you have the time?"

The man looked at the car clock and answered, "8:15."

The jogger said thanks and left. The man settled back again, and was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window and another jogger.

"Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?"

"8:25!" the man replied.

The jogger said thanks and left. Now the man could see other joggers passing by, and he knew it was only a matter of time before ANOTHER one disturbed him. So, to avoid that, he got out a pen and paper and put a sign on his window saying, "I do NOT know the time!"

Once again he settled back to sleep, and he was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window. "Sir, sir?" said a jogger, "it's 8:45!"

"The hour has come," Jesus said. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." It was time. No time left for new disciples. No time left for miracles to convince the people. No time left for debates with the religious leaders. NO TIME LEFT, the passion had come.

It was HIS hour. You know, we recently had the Golden Globes and Grammys awarded, and the Oscar nominees were announced. I once heard that phrase used about an actress. The commentator said something like, "After years of struggle to make it big in the movies, she has at last achieved fame and fortune. This film has really given her success. This is HER hour."

What was JESUS' hour of glory? It was the time between noon and three that he hung on a cross. Obviously, Jesus had a DIFFERENT idea of what GLORY is.

We call it his passion. "The Passion of Christ." That's ANOTHER STRANGE use of a word. Jesus was passionate—about his DEATH. He knew what he had to do, and he was so passionate ABOUT it that NOTHING on earth could have kept him from it.

YOU are the passion of Jesus. Even if you were the ONLY person in the whole WORLD, he would STILL have died for YOU. As the saying goes: "He would rather go to hell FOR you, than to heaven WITHOUT you."

Jesus explained what it meant with a MINI parable: "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."

Jesus OFTEN put things that way, in the language of farmers and gardeners. Because we can UNDERSTAND it. It's EASY to see that the wheat Jesus refers to is his OWN death and burial, which will be followed shortly by the resurrection. In order to BEAR that fruit, in order that ALL people might be saved from their sins and have eternal life, it was NECESSARY for the Son of Man to die and be buried, like a seed.

But then Jesus says something surprising. "Whoever serves me must FOLLOW me, and where I am, there will my servant be also." Now THERE, he's talking about US. He's carrying his analogy a step FURTHER. In order to be fruitful, WE, his FOLLOWERS, are to be grains of wheat TOO. Our old SINFUL self has to die. Our trespasses are the nails in his wrists; our sin is the crown

of thorns on his head. Jesus takes them to the CROSS with him, so that WE can be RAISED with him, to NEW life.

There's so much truth to Jesus' words in this parable. If a seed ISN'T buried in the ground, it doesn't HAVE any life. It doesn't produce ANYTHING.

I remember some years ago, Wendy and I went down to Yellowstone National Park. You could still see the scarring of the forest fires they'd had there a few years before. And they had these interpretive centers there, showing movies about the fire, and in them people were saying that it would take a hundred years or MORE for the forest to come back to its former glory, and people were MOURNING what had happened and saying that they wanted their children to see the SAME park THEY had grown up with.

But as we drove around that park, we saw something interesting. The parts of the park that had NOT burned were actually overgrown. There was a lot of underbrush. It was all kind of scraggly and brown. It wasn't all that attractive. But in the parts of the park that HAD burned, there was new life springing up all over the place. There was this beautiful, vivid green everywhere.

And it hit us, if that fire hadn't come and CLEANSED those parts of the park, they would be DYING all on their own. The people who wanted to keep it the SAME, were actually KILLING it. But God, working THROUGH fire, the NATURAL PROCESS in a forest, was actually bringing NEW LIFE.

That's what happens with a seed. A seed that ISN'T buried stays pretty much the same. But if it's buried in the ground, it ceases to become JUST a seed; it becomes something new and beautiful. It sprouts up with NEW life to make something wonderful.

The same is true with us. It's said about human life that the moment you STOP growing, you die. It's true of us physically, it's true of us emotionally, and it's true of us spiritually. When you STOP growing, when you STOP changing, you die.

Christ's words are true. He comes into our lives and changes us. The SINFUL PART of us is buried and dies, and we become something new, something better.

A real story a few years ago about a farmer, called Giants in the Earth (by O.E. Rølvaag). He was a new farmer, just off the boat from Norway, and being kind of COMPETITIVE, he wanted to be FIRST to get his seed in the ground. And he did, he BEAT his neighbors, he was the first one.

But they all just shook their heads at him, because it was TOO early. The day after he finished seeding, there was a terrible snowstorm. Several feet of snow covered his fields.

He was devastated. Here his FIRST crop was ALL LOST. He was a failure. He'd spent all he had on that farm and that first crop, and he'd lost everything, ALL his seed, BEFORE he'd even gotten started. He just sat DEPRESSED for weeks on end.

But that snow melted faster than anyone could have hoped, and one day, weeks later, the farmer's son ran into the house shouting, "Father! Father! The wheat's up! The wheat's up!"

And this is how the author described what happened next. "Per Hansa never said a word; he got up, trembling in every limb, and put the child aside. In a moment he had LEFT the house and RUSHED up to the field. There he stood SPELLBOUND, GAZING at the sight spread before him. His whole body shook; tears came to his eyes, so that he found it difficult to see clearly. And well he MIGHT be surprised. Over the whole field tiny SHOOTS were QUIVERING in the warm sunshine."

He couldn't believe it. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He had HOPE again. He WEPT with joy. It OVERCAME him. The seed that he thought was DEAD was ALIVE.

The author didn't MEAN it this way, but I think THAT is what happens inside us. Jesus takes what SEEMS to be dead in us, or IS dead, or NEEDS to die, and CHANGES it, TRANSFORMS it, makes it a NEW CREATION. He forgives our sins, giving us new life now, and eternal life to come.

And he ACCOMPLISHES all that...on a CROSS. THAT is what JESUS called GLORY.

I will take THAT over the glory of a MOVIE star ANY day.

The TIME has COME. CHRIST'S hour has COME. (Gesture to the cross.) BEHOLD, the PASSION of our Lord. Amen.