

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 18, 2018
John 12:20-33
The Reverend John P. Carr

A Grain of Wheat

Jesus gives the image of a grain of wheat dying in the ground to illustrate that in dying we are born again greater than we were. The meaning is that in dying to oneself we are born again and will follow Jesus. Those who follow Jesus are promised honor and to be with God eternally.

There is great excitement in Jerusalem!

Earlier, Jesus had come south to Judah and met his friends at the tomb of Lazarus who had died four days earlier. In a great miracle, Jesus had called Lazarus to arise and come out of the tomb and Lazarus did just that. No one had ever seen such a thing and the witnesses at the tomb in Bethany spread the word of the miracle to Jerusalem and the Pharisees.

Following this miracle, Jesus had to withdraw to the north to escape the plot to kill him. But now he has returned to the shouts of Hosanna! as he enters Jerusalem at Passover on a carpet of palms, branches and the coats of those along the road from Bethany to Jerusalem riding a young donkey. The Pharisees knew what this meant. This was how the Messiah was to arrive in Jerusalem and it certainly concerned them.

A group of Greek pilgrims ask Philip to be enabled to see Jesus. They have heard of his fame and want to see him. The question is passed on to Jesus who responds that *“the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”* The people surrounding him cannot know that he means that the hour, the time, has come for his journey to the cross. They are expecting this glorification of Jesus to lead to a political kingdom, a new king, the defeat of the Romans. This is not what Jesus means but quite the opposite. Jesus means that he is about to die and in that death will be his heavenly glorification, not a political or earthly glory.

He uses an example that they will all understand.

He uses the example of a single seed that must die to produce a head of wheat that will, when planted, yield enough to feed a nation.

But this seed must first die to create the miracle of multiplication of seed. If Jesus does not die, there will be no earthly kingdom, there will be no followers, the story will end. The way to God is through Christ, the suffering Messiah. Without the death of Jesus, the loss of that seed, there will be no followers, no way to salvation.

Those who want to follow Jesus, the life and light of the world, must suffer like he did, they must die with him to enjoy the promise of the eternal kingdom. While this may be a literal death, as in Africa and the mid East currently, it is best seen as a death to our “selves.” When we choose to die to our “selves” with the objective to come alive in Christ then we have Christ as our King in our hearts.

We are promised our reward, the honor of the Father, as ones who follow Jesus as ones who serve Jesus in our daily walk of faith. Jesus showed the disciples and us the nature of a servant that he held up as an example of humble service that we should imitate. In particular, we must think of ourselves as servants and indeed become the humble servants of Jesus. In denying ourselves, in dying to our “selves” we find that we can follow Jesus, that we can take up our cross daily and follow Him. When we deny ourselves and follow Jesus it becomes *a way of life* that not only creates a new creation in us but bears fruit in the example we set that is witnessed by others. This is the miracle of one seed becoming many.

When our seed, our “will” dies, then we live with Christ in our heart, living by the will of God. We share that love with others who share it with others. This is the miraculous love of Christ that goes on and on.

God keeps his promises. When we die to ourselves we live in Christ. The rewards are being with God and honored by God for eternity.

Amen