

*Come, Holy Spirit – open our ears, open our hearts.*

"Sir, we want to see Jesus." Those Greeks who were in Jerusalem, perhaps religious seekers, say it for us, what we've been about this Lent. "We want to see Jesus." We've been trying to put ourselves in Jesus' way, meeting him in some of the ways those around him 2000 years ago did – as healer, as justice-maker, as teacher, as both human and divine. This week we encounter him as savior – the savior of the world, and of us.

His response to hearing that these Greeks, gentiles wanted to meet him, is puzzling – I might be excited, but Jesus sees in this simple request the movement forward of his mission in this world, a movement toward his suffering and death. And he doesn't want that any more than we would. But he names his fear, he prays his fear and he recenters on his mission – to set us free from our entanglement to sin and its consequence, death.

Jesus uses the image of a seed – a grain of wheat – to speak of his sacrifice. When he says, *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.*"

He is saying, there is no life without death.

That seems to be a principle of God's realm, as it is in this world God created.

In the natural world, in our gardens or in our bodies,

life does not happen without death.

New skin grows as old cells die and are sloughed off.

Chicks only hatch if the egg breaks. Butterflies need to demolish their cocoons.

A baby is not born without trauma to the mother's body.

And yes – seeds can bear fruit only if they are buried in dark earth,

and broken open so that the new life within them can be brought to fullness.

Most seeds are planted in the ground. That seed goes into the dark earth,

which is where we put things that are dead. It's dark. It's cold. There are worms!

Maybe the seed doesn't want to open in such an environment...

Maybe it's better to stay safe, enclosed.

But inside the seed there is life, waiting to get out, pushing to get out.

Unless that seed breaks open the life inside it will wither and die.

Unless we break open the life inside us atrophies and dies.

There are times we choose to be planted as seeds,  
allow ourselves to be broken open so God's life in us can get out.  
That is our calling as followers of Christ – to follow him into the dark,  
allow ourselves to be broken and transformed from a seed into a seedling,  
and then a plant that bears abundant fruit.  
That's the trajectory of a disciple: planted, broken, transformed, fruitful.  
Every ounce of energy we spend clinging to what we have, what we love,  
what we can see, is energy not spent allowing ourselves to be  
planted, broken, transformed and fruit. Being a seed in dark earth  
involves loss and risk. Being a savior involves loss and risk.

But are we called to be saviors? Isn't Jesus the only savior the world needs?  
Well, Jesus trained his followers to do all the things he did –  
teaching, healing, seeking justice, forgiving, speaking truth to power, all of it.  
So we represent his saving work in the way we seek to help save others.

Where was Jesus' saving work done? Was it only on the cross?  
Or was it everywhere he put himself at risk, angering the leaders,  
going without sleep, choosing the road over the comfort of home?  
We could say that Jesus' first saving act was leaving the safety, the security,  
the status he enjoyed in the heavenly realms, in eternal relationship with  
the Father and the Spirit, attended by the heavenly host.  
He gave that up and allowed himself to be planted as a seed in the  
dark earth of this world, of human life, of the human heart and mind.  
He gave up his privilege to come and be with us – and so to invite us into it.

There is a clue here for how we are meant to follow in his saving work -  
to lay down our privileges too so others might share in them.  
We do not have to die for the world – Jesus has done that, once and for all.  
But we do need to die daily to our attachment to this world,  
to comfort, to convenience, to complacency.  
What is the number one obstacle to ending poverty? Our attachment to  
our comforts, to our stuff, our unwillingness to let it go for others.  
What is the number one obstacle to saving our earth? Convenience.  
We would rather be able to use disposable items that are killing wildlife and  
choking our oceans and lands than the inconvenience of washing and re-using.  
What is the number one obstacle to justice?  
Our complacency about the way things are.

Laying down our privilege means risking inconvenience, having less, even danger. But if we do that so others who have historically been shut out of our wealth can have it? That's saving work.

Doing everything we can to save this planet and its creatures – and our grandchildren – from destruction? That's saving work.

Following Jesus as savior means walking deeper into love – giving ourselves in love, open ourselves and let the life break out.

That is what Jesus invites us to do as his followers.

It is our calling as the Body of Christ, our calling as congregations to allow ourselves to be broken open, inconveniently, even painfully, our patterns and presuppositions challenged and changed, so that we can bring life and fruit to hungry people around us.

There are people who will say to us, "We want to see Jesus" if they know we can make the introductions.

Can we be willing to die to our own sense of security, our own dreams?

Can we make room for God's dreams in us?

What patterns in our life together, or in your life, need to break open?

What strangers do we need to welcome into this family?

What dream of God is trying to bust out of you? Where is God asking you be planted, broken, transformed and made fruitful?

Jesus said to his disciples on his last night with them, *"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name."*

We not only follow Jesus into the dark earth. We live in the promise that, like him, we have emerged into new Life, that Life which never ends.

Seeds don't know the glorious outcome of their process.

They just let growth happen – because it is God's life that is growing in us.

As God promised through the prophet Jeremiah: *"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

We just need to let it grow, that Life we have already begun to live.

We just need to trust that God's last word is always Life.

In the words of the wonderful hymn we will sing in a little while:

*Now the green blade rises from the buried grain/Wheat that for three days in the grave has lain /Love lives again, that with the dead has been Love is come again like wheat that springeth green. Amen*

## **John 12:20-33 – The Message**

<sup>20-21</sup> There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: “Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?”

<sup>22-23</sup> Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, “Time’s up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

<sup>24-25</sup> “Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.

<sup>26</sup> “If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you’ll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment’s notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

<sup>27-28</sup> “Right now I am shaken. And what am I going to say? ‘Father, get me out of this’? No, this is why I came in the first place. I’ll say, ‘Father, put your glory on display.’”

A voice came out of the sky: “I have glorified it, and I’ll glorify it again.”

<sup>29</sup> The listening crowd said, “Thunder!”

Others said, “An angel spoke to him!”

<sup>30-33</sup> Jesus said, “The voice didn’t come for me but for you. At this moment the world is in crisis. Now Satan, the ruler of this world, will be thrown out. And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will attract everyone to me and gather them around me.” He put it this way to show how he was going to be put to death.