

March 21, 2021

Christ Church, Dallas

John 12:20-33

Loss and Renewal

The pattern of loss and renewal runs through our lives and our world. Though you've probably never thought of it this way, it is the secret to life. You've lived and experienced it, sometimes by choice and other times by chance, but either way this pattern of life is there.

“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.”

You may not have thought of your life in these terms, but loss and renewal run through all stages of our lives.

All through our lives we have had to let parts of our old lives go in order for our lives to move forward. If you have ever fallen in love and committed yourself to another you have let go of your past life to move forward into your new one. As a parent you know the sacrifices you have made in order for the new life

of your child to emerge and grow. Parents are continually letting go of their child so he or she can grow up.

And what are the costs, and the losses, you may have paid for an education or a career. You choose certain losses and let go of some things so that other things can continue. For every choice we make, every yes we say, there are at least one no and probably many.

This same pattern exists in nature. As we enter into Spring we see the change of seasons, the new blooms replacing the fallen leaves and the setting and rising of the sun. Loss and renewal.

Scripture gives us many examples of loss and renewal. The loss of innocence in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. This is how consciousness is born. Abram left his country and family and all he knew so that a great nation could be born and he could be renamed Abraham. Jacob lost his old identity, nearly dies so that he could become a new man, with a new life. And our disciples James and John left their family, their boats and nets to become fishers of people. And Jesus taught his disciples that the Son of Man would be betrayed, killed and after three days rise again.

It's everywhere. It is a pattern of loss and renewal, dying and rising, letting go and getting back, leaving and returning. It is at the heart of our baptism and it is what we declare every Sunday in the Eucharist.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

What in your life do you need to let go of today? What do you need to leave behind? What needs to die in you so that something new can arise? I don't know about you but there are several things I should let go of so that I can move forward in a healthier and more productive way of life. It is a spiritual form of renewal that we should all embrace.

Today's Gospel, I'm sure there is no coincidence, is set in the context of the Jewish Passover feast. Passover is the celebration of the Israelites liberation from bondage in Egypt. It's about freedom and new life. It's about letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life.

We hear this morning that the Greeks want to see Jesus. Of course they do. They've heard that he changed water into wine,

fed the 5000, walked on water, gave sight to the blind and raised Lazarus from the dead. But what does Jesus say to Philip and Andrew and to us? “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.”

Here Jesus is talking about more than just physical death. In our lifetimes we die a thousand deaths. The loss of a loved one, a relationship, health, opportunities, dreams; all deaths we didn't want or ask for. Other times we choose our losses and deaths. We give up parts of ourselves for others. Sometimes we change our beliefs and values so that we can be more true to ourselves. And sometimes there are things we have to let go of, things that we cling to that keep us from enjoying the fullness of life that God had offered us; fear, anger, resentment, regret, disappointment, guilt and perhaps the need to be right and receive another's approval.

It is the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for a new life to arise.

We've all had a difficult experience that when we looked back upon it have said “I never want to go through that again. But I wouldn't have traded that experience for anything.”

As difficult or painful as that experience was it bore much fruit. You were changed and your life was renewed. That was when you were the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. This is usually the time when you know you have seen and experienced Jesus in your life. When you were absolutely sure that God was present and working in your life.

Letting go does not mean rejection or walking away. It does not mean choosing absence over presence. Letting go can allow us to be more authentic, more present to ourselves and others. I often think that when we choose to let go we are giving God something to work with.

This pattern of loss and renewal will become evident as we travel through Holy Week. And at Easter the empty tomb, the dawn of a new day, will become the renewal of life.

We all know that when we plant a seed it doesn't grow in ten minutes or over night. Growth can be slow and the fruit of new life takes time, usually longer than we want it to. Yet the power and life of God are present and at work in the depths of our lives. This is the mystery of life.

AMEN.