

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday In Lent, April 3, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 574:1-2, 237:1, 387, 421, 206:4-5.

Lessons: Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Hebrews 5: 7-9, John 12: 20-33.

Sermon Text: John 12: 20-26.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What does an ear of corn illustrate about our sermon? We hope to answer that in a few minutes.

As you heard in our Gospel lesson, there were some Greeks, some Gentiles, who wanted to see Jesus. They went to Philip who went to Andrew and they went to Jesus together. ***“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’”***

Time to be glorified. We know what that means: It is now time for him to suffer and to die and to rise again. But if you die, that is the end of your life on earth. There is nothing more you can accomplish here. But you must remember that Jesus is the very Son of God as well as son of the Virgin Mary, a true human as well as true God. In Jesus’ words about death, we see that it leads to life. Today let us consider

THE PARADOX OF LIFE COMING OUT OF DEATH

- 1. In death, Jesus Christ brings forth much fruit.**
- 2. All who lose their lives for Jesus will gain eternal life.**

A paradox is a seeming contradiction. The chief paradox, or seeming contradiction is found in Jesus’ Words ***“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*** Now all of you who have planted seeds know that that is true. The King James Translation speaks of “a corn of wheat”, using the word “corn” for any of many different grains. Jesus used that earthly illustration which we all can understand to point out that a single seed must die before it can bring forth much fruit. A head of wheat or an ear of corn comes about as a result of one seed of wheat or one kernel of corn being buried and coming back to life to produce many kernels of corn.

Jesus used this meeting as an opportunity to foretell his death by means of the picture of a grain of wheat being buried, dying, and reproducing.

In the same way that a full plant of any grain comes about because one seed died and was buried, Jesus says life really comes out of death.

What Jesus came to do on earth he has likened to a seed of grain. That seed remains nothing but a single, lonely seed unless it is planted. But when the seed is buried in the ground and dies there, a plant grows from it and bears fruit. A kernel of wheat must die to bring forth fruit and then it brings forth many seeds.

In a similar way, Jesus would not yield the fruit of his mission from God unless he first died. All his miraculous signs had no eternal benefit without the miracle of the cross and then the empty tomb. The Son of Man had to die for a spiritual harvest to come, the harvest of souls for eternity.

When a seed dies, it produces fruit. Life comes by death. This principle is true not only in nature, but it is also true spiritually. Jesus was speaking about himself. He is the grain of wheat, the seed of corn. His death would produce much fruit and would result in many people living for God on earth and then living eternally with God in heaven.

We have often heard Jesus say “my time has not yet come” or “don’t tell others yet about this specific thing you have seen me do or say”. But now, his time has come. When you read in John’s gospel from chapter 12 forward, you will find the details of his suffering, death, and resurrection.

The hour has come. The time has come for which he had been working throughout his ministry; namely, the time of his death and resurrection. This is the beginning of the climax of his ministry.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. The time is now. Make no mistake. The only way Jesus can accomplish his work is to die.

Do you remember the words from Genesis chapter 2 where we read **“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”** (Genesis 2:15-17 NIV)

“You will surely die!” That was what man had to look forward to. But not just a temporal death here on earth. It was an eternal death and separation from God and damnation for disobeying the loving God who had created him! All humans had to suffer that!

Unless – Except – unless someone else suffered that punishment. Except that God planned and sent someone else to suffer that death.

The someone we are talking about is Jesus Christ. God’s message of hope and salvation is summed up in earlier words from John: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16 NIV)

And now Jesus Christ is preparing to give up his life, to suffer horribly and to die.

Do you have a pain that irritates you and that makes you think of Christ’s sufferings? Someone told me once that even every time she suffers even a painful split on the end of her finger she thinks of Jesus’ suffering and pain – and how much greater it must be!

He suffered the pains of eternal death on behalf of all men. Jesus died **“so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

In death, Jesus Christ brings forth much fruit. Everyone who believes in him, in his death, in his work of salvation will live eternally!

Jesus’ death and then his resurrection was the Father’s full revelation of his power over death. It was a revelation of God’s glory. Jesus’ human reaction was to question the Father’s wisdom in asking Jesus to sacrifice his life. Jesus’ human reaction to the suffering before him was to ask that the cup of suffering pass from him, but nevertheless, he prayed that God’s will be done. He wanted to do the will of the Father, and thus he would glorify the Father. Jesus knew that God had brought him to this time in his life on earth to conquer death and in that event reveal the way to eternal life for us.

You are part of the fruit of Jesus’ death. You may be compared to one of many kernels of corn in a vast, unmeasured field of corn that grows as a result of one kernel – Jesus Christ, God’s Son dying and being buried!

Everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior from his or her sins is one of those many, many seeds.

Jesus also has another illustration, another fact he wants us to remember today: **“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”**

All who give up their lives for Jesus will gain eternal life. But for all who love this life more than Jesus, there will be no eternal life.

As an application of the grain-of-wheat analogy Jesus gives us the paradox of the man who, because of the love of his temporal, physical life, becomes a loser of eternal life. The man whose priorities are right, who makes the things of God most important in this life will keep his life eternally by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells us in Luke 12: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. ... Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.”** (Luke 12:15-22 NIV) He tells us in Matthew 6: **“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things – food and clothing -- will be given to you as well.”** (Matthew 6:33 NIV)

Jesus' dying would have its effect on all who follow him. In believing in him as our Substitute, we die with him. But we don't die as a substitute for others as Jesus did. We daily put to death our sinful flesh, so that we may live to Jesus.

When Jesus warns against loving our lives, he means putting this earthly life first. It's a warning against self-centeredness. Those who put all their affection on this life and what they can get out of it will one day die and lose it all – with nothing but eternal damnation to show for it.

When Jesus speaks of hating our lives in this world, he means putting him and the life he gives first. When we believe in Jesus and have eternal life in him, worldly living loses its attraction. Everything worldly carries sin's stain. Only in Jesus does the good life, eternal Life, become ours. It would be better to lose this earthly life than to lose Jesus. We safeguard our spiritual lives when we follow Jesus.

Our faith in Jesus, however, carries a price. We are his servants. We must follow where he leads. We face sacrifices. We risk the scorn of many human beings. But we do so with the promise from the heavenly Father for a life far better than life here on earth. His Son Jesus tells us: ***“whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Matthew 16:25-26 NIV)

The phrase ***“loves his life”*** describes those who serve only themselves. The words ***“hates his life in this world”*** involves serving Christ. Each believer must establish his or her priorities. We cannot give ourselves fully to this life and yet be committed to the life to come. Jesus assures us: ***“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”***

“Follow me” means to follow Jesus' example and to follow it every day, using God's Word as our guide for sanctification, for holy living. We cannot do it by ourselves, but with Jesus' help and the Holy Spirit's help, we can do it. Jesus set the example of “hating” his life in this world so that he could accomplish eternal purposes.

Jesus gives another illustration three chapters later in John's Gospel which is deserving of another sermon all by itself. But we read it here because it follows up on the picture of growth and where we, the children of God, can find our true life and growth.

Jesus tells us: ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*** (John 15:1-8 NIV)

Jesus' attitude and entire life was to glorify the Father, so that he would be glorified in God's right time. This, too, should always be our attitude, especially in times of difficulty. May God be glorified in all we think, say, live and do! Amen.

(For a sermon on John 15:1-8, go to http://www.lutheranlccf.org/MBM_Sermons_2019/Trinity_2.pdf)