

## Sermon 21 March 2021

### John 12:20-28

This short passage contains several interesting points. I want to focus on three of them. Firstly, for not the only time, we have Jesus predicting his death. *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'* He is even more explicit in Luke 9:22. *'For I, the Son of Man, must suffer terrible things,' he said, 'I will be rejected by the leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. I will be killed, but three days later I will be raised from the dead.'*

So Jesus is fully aware of what lies ahead of him, and what's more, he knows it is not going to be nice. *'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save me from this hour?" No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.'* This became even more obvious when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his arrest. *'He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.'* Luke 22:44.

This is important because it really does make his sacrifice so much more meaningful. Without wanting to diminish the sacrifice made by those who went off to war on our behalf in the past, you could argue that at least they went off with great hope of conquering and returning, albeit understanding that there was a chance they might not. In Jesus's case, there was absolute certainty that he was going to die, and what's more, it was going to be a terrible death. That really does put his sacrifice in a very different light and brings another dimension to it.

However, this brings us to the second point. Jesus also knew that his death would bring about change, that his death would be about new beginnings, new life. *'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.'* v 24. Herein lies the essence of the Easter story. We will deal with this more fully in two weeks time, but suffice to say, death leads to new life. In short, Jesus's death is followed by his resurrection, which leads to a new understanding of God and the beginnings of our Church.

Just as an observation, this does again present us with the question of the boundary between Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus as God himself. Knowing that he is not only going to die but that he would rise from death, and this resurrection would bring about glory and massive change, does tend towards Jesus certainly having the mind of God. Just a thought.

The other interesting observation on these words spoken by Jesus is that once again we see Jesus using an agricultural analogy – a grain of wheat. Jesus's audiences were by and large country people. That's the nature of society of the time, and so Jesus invariably used images that they would relate to – a farmer ploughing his field or sowing seed, a shepherd, the grape vine, the fig tree.

The third point I want to highlight is verse 26, *'Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'* Bottom line is, we are called to serve. It is a message you have heard repeatedly and I make no apologies about that. I cannot stress it enough – giving of ourselves for the benefit of others is not important to being a Christian, it is a prerequisite. We simply cannot sit here in church on Sunday worshipping God and then go about our business for the remainder of the week oblivious to the needs of others.

It was Martin Luther King who said, 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?''

I am sure you are all aware of the plans for the build of our new church. If you are not please check out our new website. There is a very good reason why these plans include provision for community facilities. As a church, let alone as individuals, we have a calling, a commitment to serve our community. I would go so far as to say that a church that is not prepared or motivated to reach out beyond its own immediate community, its worshipping community, in the end will not grow.

Let me finish by once again emphasising the point that service does not have to be a major undertaking. Just spreading around a little love is in reality a form of service. Time and time again Jesus calls us to do just this. *'I command you to love each other in the same way that love you.'* John 14:12. This is but one example. Sometimes, of course, this is not easy. On a slightly lighter note, let me conclude with a little story in illustration.

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold. The porcupines, realising the situation, decided to group together. This way they covered and protected themselves, but their quills proved to be most uncomfortable to their closest neighbours, even though they gave off warmth to each other.

After a while, they decided to distance themselves from each other but they began to die, alone and frozen. So they had to make choice: either to accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the land of the living. Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. This way they learned to live with the little wounds that were caused by the close relationship with their companion, but most importantly, they were able to survive.

The moral of the story: learn to love the pricks in your life.

Reverend Warner Wilder