

John 12:20-33

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 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. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27 "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. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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Children: show seeds and talk about dying and rising.

Back in January I planted some kale and chard seeds in small pots in my upstairs attic and put them under a grow light, about a week later little leaves poked up through the soil.

Each year I'm truly amazed by this miracle of death and resurrection that happens with the seeds I sow. I'm not surprised that Jesus chose this image of a seed dying in order to grow into something edible and necessary for us to live as a sign of God's restorative power at work in our world, and as a metaphor for both his and our own death and resurrection.

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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.

This is the miracle that we gather each week to remember and celebrate, but even more than that. It's miracle that can occur, NO make that **will** occur here today.

As a planter of seeds, I know that I have only a small part to play in the death and resurrection that takes place unseen underground. Planters of seeds enter into a partnership with the one who brings forth new life. Planting seeds requires trust, and likewise being the seeds that are planted also means letting go and trusting in this miracle of dying and rising to happen within us, so that we can bear the fruit of God's love to the world.

There's a lot going on in this passage. Jesus fame is spreading in the world, and some Greeks come, wanting to see Jesus. This particular time he doesn't respond come and see, but says the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. What a strange way to respond to this request, and the glory he's referring to isn't Super Bowl glory or Final Four glory, but suffering glory, which doesn't look much like glory at all in the world's eyes. I think Jesus doesn't really

gives much of an answer to the request of those who want to see him until the end of this passage by saying that when he is lifted up he will draw all people to himself. Faith is not just a matter of seeing Jesus, but being drawn in to this Jesus way of life, a lifestyle that's so different from what our world teaches us to value, looking out for one's self, and winning and coming out on top.

Right after his metaphor of a grain of wheat dying in order to grow and bear fruit Jesus speaks one of the most difficult sayings in all of Scripture, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. I interpret 'loving' here to mean holding on, grasping, not being able to let go and 'hating' is not so much "detesting" your life as it is rejecting or detaching from all that inhibits our relationship to the divine. Those who don't reject the world's ways and want to hold on to all the material things they love, seeking fame and worldly glory, will discover that those things don't last. But in hating, that is rejecting what the world values in terms of riches, fame and power, and letting all that be stripped away, what is finally left, at the very core of our being, is this immortal diamond that forever holds fast to our being beloved children of God.

Carrie worked in an office with her friend Beth, on a Thursday afternoon she told Beth, "I'm going to be off tomorrow as I'm going on a 3 day spiritual retreat this weekend. I'm not sure what it's all about, and I'm not real excited about it, but I promised my friend Pam that I would go with her. On Monday, Beth asked Carrie how the weekend had went. She said, "I really don't have words to describe it, other than to say that I died. I'm not the same person you knew three days ago."

What do you need to die to and let go of today? Is there some aspect of your life where you're holding on too tightly? It could be anything from a negative self-image to an obsessive need to be in control. Are you inundated with worry or anxiety? Lent is a season for our dying to anything that gets in the way of our following Jesus, anything that gets in the way of our giving our lives away in acts of service and love.

No relationship can be sustained without fairly regular "dying" experiences. The single person must die to becoming united in a relationship or marriage. The couple must die to give birth to a family. The family must die to release the children to their own life journeys. Every season of growth, creativity, change or re-orientation, requires a losing one's life in order to save one's life.

To be the body of Christ the church too follows this pattern of dying and rising. The church must die to its own needs, to its own agenda, and sometimes even to its own acts of self-preservation, giving itself away for the sake of those around it. This coronavirus pandemic has in some ways been a blessing, giving us the context to become like a seed that must die. I wonder in the year ahead what new shoots will spring forth as together we die and rise to share in Christ's abundant life. What new fruitful branches of healing and justice will we bear into the world? What new ways will we discover to be the body of Christ, broken for the healing of the world?

On an individual level, the same principles apply. When we hold on tight to our lives – refusing to become vulnerable to others, refusing to give up and release our own desires, agendas, perspectives and opinions – we lose our lives, and can end up alone and bitter. But, when we willingly let go of our own life – sharing ourselves for the sake of connection, family, friendship and intimacy – we find ourselves rich and alive with love and support. It is, perhaps, one of the greatest challenges in our increasingly individualistic and self-centered world to die to the false life of an idolized self in order to find one's true self filled with meaning through serving others and seeking justice and equity for all.

Together, we're called to die to our economic systems built on unlimited greed and consumption, in order to find a new way to live and use our wealth to build a more sustainable society. We're called to die to shortsighted, expedient exploitation of the world's natural resources for our own gain, in order to make a new covenant with the earth, and find a way to live on our planet with responsibility and restraint. We need to die to our disconnection with those who are different from us, die to our tribalism in order to build a more connected, respectful and equitable world.

Change requires dying. We cannot build new ways of being without letting go of our old. We need to let go and endure the pain, suffering and loss. Experience tells us that there will be a time of chaos and uncertainty before some new order emerges. So if we do not willingly enter this liminal space, this "dying to live" we will just continue to do things as we always have done, and in the process, we lose our lives. But, if we follow Jesus all the way to the cross and risk losing our own lives, then we will discover a new way of being in the world.

And just as the seeds in my garden have died in order to send forth their shoots and bear fruit, God is right here right now doing the very same thing. NOW we hear Jesus proclaim that his soul is troubled. NOW is the judgment of this world. NOW the ruler of this world is driven out. NOW Jesus death and resurrection will be at work in our lives. NOW all people will be drawn into God's loving embrace. NOW we are intimately connected to God and through God to all creation.

Just like when I see the first shoot of green coming up out of the earth each spring, I marvel at the similar miracle that happens to us in God's garden each Lent and Easter season. We too, like Jesus, are seeds that must die in order to bear much fruit! AMEN