

## Lent 5 John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly I tell you, 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. <sup>25</sup> Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

<sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up<sup>32</sup> from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

**What does victory look like** to you and me? It looks like two: nil in the final. It looks like surrender on the part of our enemies. It looks like success at work. It looks like vindication of who we are, our methods, our ideas. It looks like living, and not dying; it looks like saving the lives of the ones we love.

In the research and preparation I did for my ongoing lent course, I was genuinely surprised to read that Jesus was not always perceived as a 'hero' in early Christianity — not in the way we think of heroes. We had to wait for the middle ages before anyone made comparisons between Jesus and the heroes of folklore, such as Beowulf. So it was then, through ancient poems like 'the dream of the rood' that Jesus was first restyled as a heroic figure — nobly and actively going to the cross, to defeat sin the world and the devil through his paradoxical defeat. For us this is now quite a common idea — our world is saturated with story, and action adventure stories often contain some sort of coded reference to death and resurrection. To take two, we have Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars* who gallantly enters the death star, and comes out having rescued the princess — a story arc similar to Christian ideas of Jesus going down to hell to rescue the dead; and then one of the most recent films I've watched, in *Guardians of the Galaxy* Groot, the weird tree-man, rapidly grows branches around his friends to protect them in a dense ball while the space ship they are in crashes to the ground. He dies to save them — but then it seems a graft of him still lives on, to regrow. Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, as we have just read.

To make these comparisons may seem as if we are reducing Jesus *only* to the role of a hero, which I would not want to do. Jesus is vastly different in a couple of ways — firstly Jesus is without sin, while other heroes are not. Secondly, Jesus is deliberate in succumbing to violence and not retaliating. The Christian story is unique in this respect. If there are other stories of a peaceful hero they come later than, and in response to, Jesus. But mostly our heroes, from Beowulf to Bond succeed through being better, bigger, stronger, faster — in a fight.

The central theme of the passage we read today is Jesus predicting his death, and saying (for the first time in John's gospel) that his time *had* come. And amidst this come the metaphor of the grain of wheat falling to the ground. I don't know much about farming, but I'm sure the

grain does not literally die! This, however, is not the point. The point is, I think, that farmers work hard to grow and gather grain for food. What a paradoxical action then, to keep back a portion of useful food and scatter it back on the ground. What a sacrifice we make each year, in order to eat the next! And Jesus is such a sacrifice. Apparently 'wasted' by dying so soon and so young — and yet this is the thing that creates new life, not only in his own resurrection, but in us too — bidding us into the resurrection: new life for everyone!

This is a surprise for his listeners at the time, but familiar to us. Perhaps we should also hear how surprising it is that Jesus immediately tells his followers and us that anyone who loves their life will lose it, while those that hate their life will keep it for eternity. I think you all know that Jesus often uses hyperbole — using exaggerated, non-literal statements to get his effect. So you really doesn't want you to hate your life — this is the same Jesus who has come that you may have life and have it to the full. Instead, the suggestion might be that you hold your life on an open hand — not clinging to every advantage you might find for yourself if in fact it could be shared or given for others. We are, to put it another way, to live life just as Jesus did — not standing on our own dignity, not seeking every advantage for ourselves, not living for our ourselves but for others. We should be Christ-shaped.

Having been saved by Christ, we should start to look like Christ — loving, humble, gentle, willing to make sacrifices to bless others.

For us this will likely not involve martyrdom (thank God), but for many, including many early believers, it did. A second century church Father called Tertullian wrote that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'. You might think that the prospect of martyrdom would keep most people away from this faith, but the opposite was true. Such courage spoke more remarkably of the hope of eternal life than any polished speech — and the lives of such people held a depth of integrity that was rarely matched. It makes no sense to a world that worships conquering heroes, but we know it makes sense — better sense, really.

So, how are we going to be Christlike? We may not sacrifice our lives, like Jesus, but we can make the small sacrifices that show that we see things with Jesus's eyes, and act with a love, and softness that makes no sense, and makes every sense. Our values are different values, and that massively shapes what we do, and how we do it. If we let our egos die, if we let our self-care die a little, we can reap a far greater harvest, which we will enjoy as well as God.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, only you could die for the sins of the world. We can't do that, but we pray, by your Holy Spirit, that we might be more like you, and by making what sacrifices we can, see a real harvest of faith, goodness and love in the world we know — and see your kingdom come.

Amen.

Next Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> at 10 am, Palm Sunday Benefice Service at Yoxford

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> Face to Face Basic Course, an essential Safeguarding course for anyone who does anything in the church, Darsham Village Hall, 10 to 12.30

Good Friday 29<sup>th</sup> Stations of the Cross 2pm, a time of reflection as we follow the route Jesus took to the cross

Easter Sunday, 9.30am an Informal Service with Communion. Followed by an Easter Egg Hunt for all who like chocolate