

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fifth Sunday of Lent - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:1-12

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very 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. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever 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. 28Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29The crowd standing there heard it

and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Reminder

Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota, Kappa, Lamda, Mu, Nu, Xi, Omikron, Pi, Rho, Sigma, Tau, Upsilon, Phi, Chi, Psi, and Omega.

Again...

Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota, Kappa, Lamda, Mu, Nu, Xi, Omikron, Pi, Rho, Sigma, Tau, Upsilon, Phi, Chi, Psi, and Omega.

Over and over again. That was how I spent the first few days of seminary. The alphabet was only the first class. After that we were on to nouns, learning the feminine, masculine, and neuter endings. When we had those basics finished it was time for the verb, all 60-something versions of its ending. Then... the dreaded participle... There are simply no words for the pain that grammatical function caused in my life...

Greek was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. I probably hold the record for most times taking the class. It took me three times to pass biblical Greek, and I'm not very proud of that. It was after the second failure that I was finally tested and diagnosed with ADHD. Which wasn't an excuse, it just made the struggle of Greek that much harder for me. Greek is a lot like mathematics, you just need to memorize the formula. SO MUCH memorizing! It exhausts you and wears you down as you go over it again and again and again.

It's kind of like Lent. This season of the church year could almost be considered an introduction to Christianity, in overdrive. The themes are the hallmarks and basic building blocks for a Christian faith. So we hear them a lot. They're also some of the strongest themes in Lutheran theology, too. Last week we were confronted with the reality of justification by grace through faith apart from works and today we get Luther's theology of the cross.

But much like biblical Greek, we need to hear it often if we're going to understand it. They used to say that it was the goal of seminary Greek to push you to the point where you start to dream in the language. Well, Christianity is no different, we need to cram these foundational ideas down our throat till we live and breathe them. So about suffering and the theology of the cross... if you're tired of hearing it, just be glad we're not learning Greek.

There is another reason why it might seem like I preach about this so much. I can't remember when, but at some point someone tried to argue with me that while we are supposed to imitate Jesus Christ, our goal isn't the same as his, and so we're not held to the same standard. You hear different versions of this in congregations all around the world. The argument that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins and that we're called to a happier life, it's just so frustrating. Especially when you look back at readings like today's Gospel lesson.

“25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” Does that sound like we get off easy?

*“The seed must die, one’s life must be spurned (‘hated’), the servant must follow Jesus to the extremes where he is (vv. 24-26b) if earthly exile is to end in glory,”*¹ one commentator writes.

One of the more convicting things about the text today is that the “church-goers,” you and me, are the ones that are ignoring Jesus. The Gentile Greeks are the ones who are captivated and approach Jesus. The ones on the outside come to see what Jesus is doing. The Greeks approach Philip... simply because he has a Greek name. Philip goes to Andrew, the other disciple with a Greek name, to see what to do. So if you ever feel like your relationship to someone is too weak to merit you sharing your faith, just remember the time some Greeks approached a disciple, simply because he had a similar name.

And what does Jesus do? He teaches them. The seed must fall to earth and be reborn. It’s a beautiful metaphor for our lives here on earth. We cling to our existence, to what we think holds merit and value, but we’re still just a seed. Our true beauty has yet to be shown, our bodies hold within them a reflection of God the creator, waiting to be watered, cared for, so that true growth might show forth.

In fact, I’ve spent too long talking about us in the first place. The text today makes it clear that human beings aren’t the focus, it’s not even Jesus. The subject of the active verb for us today is God. Jesus is highlighted in his obedience to God during Jesus’ time on earth. It

¹Sloyan, Gerard S. *John*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. pp. 156

reminded me of 1 Corinthians 3: “6 *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.* 7 *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*” Now, these verses are addressing a different context but I think they can help us realize the beauty of what God had done for us.

When we only care for ourselves, when we put our safety and salvation first, we ignore everything around us. Think about it. We spend all this time in the church arguing about whether someone is saved or not, forgetting that God’s grace saved us already. Stop worrying about it! Stop the navel gazing and move on with your life! We haven’t been freed from sin so that we can continue under its burden, constantly worrying and second guessing our decisions! No! We have been freed from sin SO THAT we can go out and be what God always wanted us to be!

The Jesuits have a saying about formation; Men and Women for Others. That is what we are, that is the purpose for which we have been created! Love the other, care for the stranger, nurture creation! That is where God has called us, the seed from which we sprout. Amen.