

'Some Greeks wish to see Jesus' - John 12.20-33

Passiontide - 5th Sunday of Lent

A Reflection by Corinne Craymer

This Sunday is a time in Lent when we especially begin to remember what happens to Jesus - His suffering and His death - but with promising hints of resurrection and ascension. We cannot get to the glorious end we know about, without first encountering a story about evil, sin and the unspeakable suffering of God crucified.

It is the Greeks who come asking to see Jesus that seem to prompt Him to talk about His death. Jesus wants to talk about a grain of wheat, probably much to the astonishment of his disciples. The grain of wheat is Jesus' response to those who want to see him. So, what does it really mean?

Jesus talks about the cycle of death and new life to prepare those around Him for his Passion and today the story also prepares us for soul-troubling reading of Christ's Passion. If we think back to the first sign in John's Gospel in Cana in Galilee when Jesus turned water into wine: talking to His mother who had taken an initiative not of His choosing, Jesus said, 'My hour has not yet come'. Today He says the opposite, 'My hour has come'. It's time to tell a story about a grain of wheat dying, buried and rising up to bear fruit. Jesus makes it clear that self-sacrifice in the form of service and servanthood is the only way for anyone who wishes to follow Him.

I remember planting seeds in deep pads of cotton wool at primary school and watch them disappear as thick cress sprang up. It was a miracle of sorts for a tender young mind, yet in essence I believe now that this is what Jesus was talking about.

I also remember a huge apple tree which had blown down in a tremendous storm and it lay across my garden with half its roots exposed. I knew the tree well since my childhood swing had dangled from its branches, and now here it was sadly dying. However, before we had a chance to deal with it, that spring it first flowered and then against all the odds it began to show tiny apples which became splendid fruit, fully formed. Its tap root had somehow reached deep down into the soil for nourishment. In dying it had produced the best fruit I'd ever seen. It was only years later with hindsight that I understood a deeper message.

In Paul's letter to The Hebrews, he talks about a son who learned perfect obedience. Jesus is that Son who will therefore glorify God through his dying and rising. Troubled and deeply prayerful, Jesus turns to His Father and recognises the hour has come for Him to give all the glory to God's name. Those around Him are watching and listening as God's voice in reply sounds like thunder to them, 'I have glorified it and I will glorify it again'. Even now Jesus is concerned for His disciples, that they should understand

what God is saying to them. That Jesus' death on a cross will be the means by which God is glorified.

The confused crowd ask Jesus questions about what He has said. Who is The Son of Man? What does being lifted up mean? They don't understand, and we only understand, with hindsight. 'I'm with you for a little while longer' says Jesus. 'Walk in my light'.

So how do we walk in the light? We are like the Greeks; we want to see Jesus too. How do we see Him? Through service and servanthood, He says.

These last twelve months have seen some awe-inspiring service to others, care and devotion given sacrificially by doctors, nurses, bus drivers, teachers, supermarket assistants, police and ambulance drivers to name but a few. It's difficult to single out a few examples of loving thoughtfulness but they give a flavour of what I think Jesus was talking about.

There was the man called Lou Macari who set up sleeping pods with heaters and TVs for homeless people, so they could watch the real news about what was happening in their world. Next there was Marcus Rashford who worked tirelessly to raise food standards for the children of low-income families.

And a dog owner who filmed his walks with his dog Max to show on the Internet to help anxious and depressed people. And a lady who runs a stable used by people with all sorts of disabilities in the heart of a London suburb. Their money had run out and people were devastated that the stables would close. But kind-hearted and generous benefactors gave enough to keep the stables open. What a story. Jesus would like this. When we work selflessly for others, we bring the Kingdom a little closer. It's not always the great public acts of care that matter, it's the small everyday acts of love and kindness to others that build God's Kingdom.

Seeing Jesus, and getting to know Jesus, is exciting and compelling. There are so many different ways in which we can do this. One of the ways is by getting involved in listening to others talk about Jesus and by asking our own questions, as we discover more about who He is and what He has done for us. St Botolph's church is starting a new online course after Easter for anyone who wants to learn more about Jesus, His life and His mission. Look out for emails and posters about this course and start to think about whether it might be right for you at this time to wonder about God's relationship with us all. Or perhaps you know someone who is wondering what life is all about recently, friends, family or neighbours?

Our story today is all about loss and renewal. About Jesus' death and resurrection and about the glory He has given to His Father. We all know about loss and renewal. In each lifetime we encounter death. We face job losses, losing our health, losing those we love through no fault of our own, losing our youth, facing our own death. Following

Jesus can involve loss too - we have to let go of many things, often our old familiar ways but we also see new life beyond our imaginings.

We experience renewal and growth. We have all witnessed watching a baby grow into a toddler. Bulbs that have lain hidden have come to life and produced beautiful blooms. We have seen people with terrible injuries being rehabilitated and heard accounts of the homeless being offered a roof over their heads to make a home.

In our Eucharist there is a sentence we always say which sums up God's story. It goes straight to the heart of the Christian message: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. This is the hope we share. Let's go today with Jesus' words ringing in our ears. 'Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. Amen.