

## John 12:20-33

Today is known as **Passion Sunday**, as we begin the season in which we recall the **Passion of Jesus**, his journey to Jerusalem, his betrayal, trial, sufferings, death and resurrection. These events would separate the merely curious from true disciples, as Jesus does in challenging his followers in our Gospel reading today.

*'Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, .. and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'* (v20-21) A commendable request, but it seems likely these Greeks were spiritual tourists, come to see the latest attraction. The Greeks were known for always wanting to hear or see something new. But the response from Jesus challenges them to a much deeper consideration of what life is all about, *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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.'* (v23-24)

Jesus was speaking of himself, as he walked with purpose and determination towards his death and resurrection in Jerusalem. His death would *'bear much fruit'*. Rather an understatement! It would change the world forever. Although it looked like the end, in fact it was a new beginning. Through his death, the relationship between God and humanity changed forever, the way to eternal life, forgiveness and peace was broken open.

Jesus says here, *'The hour has come'*. The time had arrived when Jesus' work on earth would reach its climax. The good news for both Jews and Greeks was about to be revealed. With this comes the challenge, both to those Greek seekers and to us *'Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.'* (v25-26) Jesus invites us to identify ourselves with him, as we express in our Baptism promises, to follow in his footsteps, to find life by dying to ourselves! Not the sort of invitation we are usually looking for! A few years ago, Julia and I received an invitation from the Queen to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace. We really enjoyed it, a wonderful day out. But our King, Jesus, is not inviting us to indulge ourselves but to deny ourselves, to serve our Lord by identifying with him and following his pattern of finding life through death. It seems a harsh saying. What Jesus is saying here is, *'Where is your heart?' 'What do you love most of all?' Is it yourself? Are you willing to give up your selfishness to gain something much better?*

The principle we see in nature is true spiritually as well. As all gardeners know well, a seed must first be buried in the ground, and its outer husk broken open for the life within to come out, as we see in all the spring bulbs. Only if it *'dies'* will it *'bear much fruit'*. If our lives revolve solely around ourselves, we risk being fruitless in God's Kingdom. If we live lives of loving Christ and loving others, we will bear fruit to the glory of God.

*'Where I am, there will my servant be also'*, says Jesus. He asks us to identify with him, to share both his death and his new life. If we want to know the overwhelming joy of Easter and resurrection life, we first must know what it is to die with Christ, to die to sin and selfishness, to learn to love God, and our neighbour as ourselves.

And all who find life in such loving service receive their reward. *'Whoever serves me, the Father will honour'*, says Jesus. Each year the Queen gives honours to many people, but to be honoured by God Almighty is something far beyond any earthly blessing. Beyond our wildest dreams. But the promise is there for all who will love God more than themselves, who will die to self and live for God.

Let us seek to walk the way of the cross this Lent and Easter time, and find that life which is abundant and eternal.