

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent
The Rev. Robin Teasley
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Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "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. 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. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"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. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. John 12:20-33

Sir, we wish to see Jesus. That's what they said. That's what they thought they wanted, those Greeks who came to Phillip asking him to show them the Jesus about whom they had heard so much. They had traveled far to be in Jerusalem for the festival of Passover, hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Something was changing. New and different people were arriving from far off places, and they were all seeking something. They had heard about Jesus and wanted to see him for themselves. When Philip and Andrew told Jesus, he took their request as evidence that news of him had gotten out in the world, like a viral YouTube video, confirming for him that the hour had come for him to be lifted up. And then Jesus explains who he is and what his work must be.

Jesus says he is a grain of wheat that will fall to the ground and die, but this single grain will be raised up to bear much fruit. And then Jesus invites them, and us, to follow him. We are called to follow Jesus to see what he sees, to do what he does, and to go where he goes. Because that is how we see Jesus. We follow him and we become grains of wheat that fall to the ground, that die to self, in order to produce fruit that then reveals Jesus to others.

It's not always easy to see Jesus. Have you seen Jesus lately?

I saw Jesus this past Wednesday. In the morning I met with our Regathering Team to plan for returning to in person worship. They are working hard to make things both safe and welcoming to all. Next, I met with several members of the Altar Guild to continue planning for worship to include those traditions that are beloved to us in Holy Week and for Easter. I saw Jesus in the planning and care being taken on our behalf, because Jesus seeks first the welfare of all the people, and insists that all are welcomed into God's great love.

I then met with our Bishop and other clergy from across the diocese on our weekly Zoom call, where an amazing psychologist talked with us about how challenging this pandemic has been for us all. To be with someone who listened to us and understood our challenges had some of us in tears. She was Jesus to us in that hour.

Finally, I went over to Virginia State University for my vaccine appointment. It was the first day for this new vaccine site and they were experiencing the usual opening day problems. Arriving to find a line that was blocks long, circling around the campus, my heart sank. I was already tired, it was chilly, and I was wondering if it was worth the wait. Standing next to me in line for two hours was a man from Nigeria who is a professor of economics at the university. We had plenty of time to get to know each other. What I will remember most from our conversation is that he gestured to the crazy long lines and said, "You are blessed to have this in America. In Nigeria we do not have this. The poor nations like ours do not have this. We will be lucky if we receive the leftovers." My new friend from Nigeria knew he was blessed to be in a line for two hours to receive the vaccine. He was Jesus, reminding me of the poor.

Jesus was there, in the long lines of patient people, with those who were hobbling or in wheelchairs with any number of the comorbidities most of us do not have to check off on the vaccine survey. Jesus was there with the police making sure traffic flowed, with the volunteers who welcomed us to campus with joy, with the healthcare workers who had been standing on concrete floors even longer than we had been out on the sidewalks. Jesus was there, healing the people.

In all of the events of the day, I could see Jesus, and could see hope that perhaps something is changing, hope that there will be much fruit resulting from the fallen grains of the pandemic hope that resurrection will surely follow any death.

There are so many people everywhere who are seeking something. They have heard about Jesus but they are not sure they see him in the world today, in the institution we call church, or in the lives of people professing to be Christians. They do not see the fruit; they do not see the grains of wheat falling into the earth.

Our work as disciples is to continue looking for Jesus, and to bear fruit in new ways, even as we continue to let go of those parts of ourselves that are not bearing fruit. Are we willing to die to our selfishness, to die to our need to always be right, or in control; to die to the use of violence to solve the problem of violence? Are we willing to be like grains of wheat?

If we want to see Jesus, we will need to go where the people are. We will need to see the people Jesus sees, the people Jesus helps, the people Jesus heals. Then we must fall like grains of wheat into the earth as we teach good news, heal the sick, feed the hungry, show compassion to the weary, and bring justice to those living on the margins of society.

Have you seen Jesus lately?

Jesus reminds us, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also." Amen.