

Sunday March 18, 2018
Good Samaritan
The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Please pray with me, Lord help us to come and to see you, help us to desire your wisdom and goodness in our own lives. Help us to lay down our own lives so that we might be about walking in your ways. Amen

This is the last Sunday of Lent before Holy Week and we are coming to the culmination of Jesus' ministry on Earth. Today in our Gospel passage we find Jesus being surrounded by people who want to see and hear him. The people in the John passage were Greeks, who most likely were intrigued by the moral upstanding nature of Jesus' teaching and the emphasis of one God.

The people in Jesus' time were swimming in a world of paganism and duplicity. The culture sought to do what was right in their own eyes. There was no good way or holy way just a world full of pleasing many different gods or goddess with little emphasis on the importance of human life. In the everyday life of the Greeks they believed they were at the mercy of many different fickle gods, who got angry, jealous, and always turning this and that way. There was no stability or steadiness just an endless amount of trying to figure out how to appease the gods. They were in an endless loop of filling up libations and pouring them out to the gods, it would never end.

The people of Jesus' time sound very much like our own time. Our culture runs from one thing to the next never slowing down or seeking to understand the nature of God. We feel the need to please the god of busyness and to take up every opportunity we can. Our culture seeks to live for the now and not worry about the future. If you want it buy it now and don't worry about paying for it. We are told to please ourselves and not worry about others they will take care of themselves. We also sacrifice others for the sake of our own gain. Our culture today is so very much like the time of Jesus.

The encouraging part of today's Gospel is the hunger people are having for the teachings of Jesus. People are craving the message of hope, love, and sacrificial living. They, like we, are lost and desire something more. God has given each and every human being a desire to hear him and to dwell within his stability and steadfastness. It is our choice whether we come to him and give our lives to him. The Greeks are looking at the pagan world around them and craving the direction of Jesus. Today we are in the fifth Sunday of Lent do we seek to hear him as well? Do we seek to be in the presence of Jesus and to bend the knee of our heart to his ways?

Word of Jesus' ministry and healings had spread and people were following Him and desiring to hear what he is preaching. His message of salvation was reaching people from all backgrounds. The Greeks came to Philip most likely because of his greek name and he and Andrew approached Jesus with this request. Jesus' response is a foretelling of what was to come next. The expansion of the kingdom of God was beginning to spread. Jesus' ministry was growing and God had a plan for it to expand far beyond the disciples imagination. Expansion and growth had to come through death and the ending of one thing and the beginning of another.

I love gardening. I love being outside in nature hearing birds and digging and seeing growth. I love watching fruit come out of the ground. I love watching the trees change, bud, and bring forth new life. It is amazing and awe inspiring to me. God's creation, beauty, and order are meant to be signs to us about His nature and His desire for our lives. Jesus goes on to teach that unless a seed falls to the ground and dies it can not bear more fruit. One seed is as only good as it's death in the ground. One seed can mean lots of other seeds or it can mean the end of itself.

Our lives are like this either by dying to ourselves we can invest in the lives of others or by living for this life here and now we will lose it for eternity. It is really tempting to love the things of this life. To seek out making this life as easy as possible for ourselves but this is not what God would have for us. Death is difficult and hard. Death means the end of something and the fear of the unknown or what lies beyond it. Dying to ourselves means seeking out opportunities to serve others, to provide for their comfort at the expense of our own, and to choose another person especially when we want to please ourselves.

After twelve years of marriage, seven pregnancies, four ordinations, six years of homeschooling, and countless other obstacles I would have to say the overwhelming gift of these years is learning how to die to myself and how to sacrifice for another. Fr. Chris and I are tremendously blessed in our life by living a life of sacrificial love. He suffers, struggles, and lays down his life for me on a daily basis. I, in turn, suffer, struggle, and lay down my life and ego for him. This has made our life sweet, steady, and truly beautiful. In a current culture of self-pleasure, constantly changing relational status, and seeking what makes you happy we have witnessed extreme depression, severe abuse, and rampant addiction. Families are broken, kids are forgotten, and elderly are abandoned. Jesus has so very much for us. While his ways may appear harder, which they are, they are also far more richer and beautiful.

Jesus goes on to say that if we love our life here on earth then we will lose it. Where our treasure is so is our heart. Each and everyone of us will die and no longer live on this earth. We do not and can not know when that will be. Some of us will have long lives and others will have short lives. What matters is how we live our life everyday. Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be." Living a life of sacrificial love is not meant to be done on our own, because trust me it can't be done. There is no way to will yourself to choose the good every time. It is only by the grace of God that we can serve others, be turned outward, and love others even when they are unloveable.

Jesus promises, "My Father will honor the one who serves me." When we serve others, lay down our hopes, expectations, and ideas for another then we serve Jesus. That means that it doesn't depend on the approval of the person we are caring for but rather our Father in heaven who sees us and knows us. Jesus is our audience when we serve someone, work hard for them, and bend ourselves outward.

Jesus reminds us today in the gospel of John that His suffering had to happen in order to glorify God. While Jesus wanted to pass his cup of suffering on and we see him in the garden of Gethsemane asking God to pardon him. And yet Jesus came to a place of acceptance and trust in God's plan to redeem the world through His suffering and death. When we suffer here on earth we can draw close to the one who has suffered greatly. Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself." We are not alone but have the great privilege to call

upon Jesus to draw us close to him to find comfort and sustenance. And it is not for us alone but for those who need to hear the Gospel and to know the love of God. There are so many people around us who live in the main culture of the day and who need to hear the message of the Gospel. So many who do not know His love, mercy, or desire to bring them stability and steadfastness. So many drowning in the double tongued message of our day which says to make yourself happy and yet in doing so only brings more sorrow into their lives.

Jesus promises that if we walk with him then we walk in the light. He actually implores his listeners, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you." Have you ever been walking in a place when the lights have gone out? It is almost impossible unless you know the place very very well to get around without stubbing your toe. We need light to see where it is we are going in the darkness. Jesus says, "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

We hear over and over again in the Bible that to be people who walk in the light means to be followers of Jesus. What we do in our lives we should feel comfortable doing before Jesus. One of my litmus tests for deciding on something in my life is to ask the question would I feel comfortable wearing that, saying that, doing that, or thinking that out loud in front of my church. Since seeing my life through this lense has challenged me significantly on the way that I live. If you walk into my home you should find the same person living there that you see on Sunday at church. Walking in the light means living a life that serves others, denies oneself, and seeks to serve the Lord in everyday situations.

Today we are given this beautiful invitation to be like a seed which goes into the ground and dies in order to give more life. Our prideful wills and desires to live as we see fit are meant to die. Our desire to be right and justified in every way that we feel is meant to die. Our desire to demand on our way is meant to die, so that Jesus can shape us anew and make us like a plant that produces far more fruit than we could imagine. The disciples could only imagine the Messiah kicking out the Romans and setting right their land and people. Instead Jesus the son of God came and gave his life and suffered in order to give freedom and to draw all men to himself. Jesus wants to grow your understanding of him today and to show you that if you struggle along with him He will give you beautiful blessings.

People of Good Samaritan what does God want to do in this place to bring about his kingdom? How does God want us to share our lives and his transforming work with others? What does Jesus want you to die too in order to bring deep rich blessings in your life? Who is God calling you to serve and lay down your life more fully?

Jesus loves each and everyone of you. He wants good, beautiful things in your life, and He wants you to illumine His love to the world. Share His love, give generously, and reap his steadfastness and stability.

To God be the glory now and forever. Amen