

## Online Service Sermon – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021 – Lent 5

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:5-10 and John 12:20-33.

Aim: The privilege and the cost of Christian discipleship.

The amazing truth of the gospel hits us full force this morning. We cannot, from what we have just heard read ignore the centrality of Jesus' death upon the Cross. 2000 years on there may be a tendency in our thinking to focus on the risen, ascended and glorified Christ, and upon the gift of his Holy Spirit. And to ignore what has gone before. But it is through Jesus Christ's death on the cross that he has become the source of eternal salvation.

The world, generally, is dismissive about the meaning of life being understood through a cruel death on a cross. The world finds it narrow-minded, ethically dubious, even intellectually naïve, and religiously intolerant to believe that through this death on the cross we can have access to life in all its fullness. Here we are forced to make a choice. We can either accept or reject the claims that Christ made. It's all or nothing.

As John sees it, Jesus makes a clear link between glorification and crucifixion v23 "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified – except a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds." The death and resurrection of Jesus should not be seen as a defeat at Calvary, which was put right by the powerful, victorious act of resurrection. Rather both death and resurrection represent one inseparable event, in which Jesus achieves the Glory of God. We find the same truth reiterated in verse 31/32 "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself".

Now to us these words are hard. But we are in Lent, and this is a special time for trying to go deeper into the meaning of the events that led up to Good Friday. How can we enter fully into the wonder of our Risen Lord on Easter Sunday, if we have not glimpsed even ever so slightly something of the anguish and suffering that he endured - two events that are inseparable?

Hebrews has so many lessons for us. The words proved a stern and timely warning to those whose faith was wobbly. They are having second thoughts about it all and are in danger of abandoning their Christian commitment. The writer is seeking to strengthen them so that they will renew their resolve to hold fast to stand firm in their faith, He warns them of God's judgment and exhorts them to covenantal faithfulness and unwavering perseverance. It is a stark reminder to them of both the privilege and the cost of Christian discipleship.

This is something John picks up on in our gospel passage (12:25) when Jesus says "Those who loves their life will lose it, those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My father will honour the one who serves me.'

The faith that we should grow in is one that is grounded in the significance of Jesus and his sacrificial death, his supreme faithfulness to God: his endurance and obedience. It is through Christ's death that he has secured for us unlimited access to God.

Jesus talked to his father in heaven. Hebrews puts it this way "he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and He was heard because of His reverent submission". Jesus is our example. I wonder how often we offer up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.

Are we able to cry out to God in our anguish? God wants us to. He wants us to express to him all the depths of our emotions and fears and also of course our joy and happiness and thankfulness. Do we believe that he will hear us and that he will answer our prayers? Sister Frances Dominica writes, 'If we really pray we take a big risk because by doing so we are saying "Here I am, send me"'. God may take us at our word. If God's own way is one of costly involvement, perhaps we might need to risk that ourselves.

Returning to John v 28 we read that Jesus cried out "Father glorify thy name". And what happens next? A voice came from heaven, to confirm that God had heard Jesus' prayer. We read in the bible that God spoke to Jesus at all the key points in his life on this earth.

I believe that God will speak to each one of us, if we will but listen and if we have the faith. He does not leave us alone, he has promised to be our God. He will give us directions and when he gives us a task he does not leave us to do it on our own, but supplies the strength.

Jesus through his death on the cross has won for us eternal life.

Jeremiah wrote in ch31 v31 " 'The days are coming,' declares the Lord,' when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah' ". At the time he did not yet know how God would fulfil this promise of a new covenant. But our readings from John and Hebrews give us the answer that the new covenant carved on human hearts is the promise God makes to us all in Jesus. The cost of God keeping his promise to us, despite our inability to keep our side of it, is written on the human heart, the human life and death of Jesus. The way in which God does what we cannot and will not do, is to come himself as one of us and keep both sides of the promise himself.

The place of triumph is the cross "I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to me". So when in Jeremiah God promises his people that they will know him intimately v 33 "I will be there God and they will be my people," He is not going to create robots who automatically respond to him. No, he wants us to recognise him because he became one of us. We will see his pain, his struggles and his costly obedience and recognise that that is the truth of our own humanity. As God has fulfilled both sides of the covenant, he has won for us through Jesus' death, our freedom.

Let us all today come to the Father and thank Him for what Jesus did for us on the Cross and take the opportunity for a fresh start, and continue to grow our relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

