

Gospel reflections

John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

"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" (John 12:24).

Jesus shares the secret to life. It's the pattern of loss and renewal that runs throughout our lives and our world. Even if you've never thought of this as the secret to life, you've lived and experienced it, sometimes by choice and other times by chance. Either way it's there.

This pattern is present in all our lives. Have you ever fallen in love and committed your life to another? If so, you had to let parts of your old life go and something of your single life died so that you could be with that other person. How about parenting? If you are a parent, you know that there are sacrifices of yourself and your life to be made for the new life of your child to emerge and grow. Parents are continually letting go of



their child so she or he can grow up. Have you ever been the caretaker of another? If so, you could name the parts of your life that died so that another might live with dignity, compassion, and love.

What are the costs, the losses, you paid for an education or a career? You chose certain losses and let go of some things so that other things could arise. For every choice we make, every 'yes' we say, there is at least one 'no' and probably many.

This same pattern is in nature. You can see it in the changing of the seasons, falling leaves and new blooms, and the setting and rising of the sun.

Loss and renewal can be seen in Bible stories as well. Innocence in Adam and Eve died so that consciousness might be born. Abram left his

country and kindred so that he might be made a great nation, renamed Abraham, and be a blessing to all the families of the earth. James and John left their father, boats, and nets to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of people.

It's everywhere. It is a pattern of loss and renewal, dying and rising, letting go and getting back, leaving and return. It's at the core of our baptism and it's what we declare every Sunday in Holy Communion.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

I don't think it's a coincidence that this week's gospel is set in the context of the Passover feast. The Passover feast that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites' from bondage in Egypt. It's about freedom and new life. It's about letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life.

There is something about this pattern that is the lens through which we see Jesus. Some Greeks come to Philip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." We are not told why they want to see Jesus, but we can

imagine. Jesus turned water into wine. He healed the son of the royal official. He healed the paralytic. He fed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He walked on water. He gave sight to the man born blind. He raised Lazarus from the dead. Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks and their request. Philip and Andrew tell Jesus. And Jesus says to them, "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." That's his response to those who want to see him; to the Greeks, to you, to me.

The dying that Jesus is talking about is more than just the physical death we all face. We die a thousand deaths throughout our lifetime. The loss of a loved one, a relationship, health, opportunities, a dream; all deaths we didn't want or ask for. Other times we choose our losses and deaths. We give up parts of ourselves for another. We change our beliefs and values so that we can be more authentically ourselves. And sometimes there are things we need to let go of, things we cling to that deny us the fullness of life we want, and God offers: fear, anger or resentment, regret and disappointment, guilt, the need to be right, approval.

Seeing Jesus isn't a spectator sport. It is a way to be followed, a truth to be embodied, a life to be lived. It's being a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bear much fruit. That's where we see him. It's the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for new life to arise. Through the letting go we can be more authentically present to ourselves and another. It makes room for new life and new ways of being present to arise. Our letting go gives God something with which to work.

This pattern of loss and renewal is very apparent in the readings for Lent and Holy week. This text prepares us for Holy Week and we know where that ends. At Easter, the empty tomb, the dawn of a new day, and the renewal of life. The single grain has become the Bread of Life.

Adapted from [Michael Marsh](#)

Prayer of Confession

(inspired by John 12:20-33)

Lord, we confess that we love our lives as they are.
We struggle with even the *idea* of change.
We wrestle with the thought of doing things differently.
But we know that the life we cling to is only a half-life.
Only you, O Lord, can give us true life in full.
Forgive us for holding onto the wrong things.



Teach us by your Spirit to *let go* of our agendas and assumptions.
Help us to let go of our self-righteousness and false notions of power.
Give us the strength and courage to try new things.
Encourage us – and even push us –
to let go of ourselves so we can fully embrace you, Holy God.
We pray these things in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

By Amy Loving, and posted on *The Worship Closet*.

Sacred space

- ❖ '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.' In my life, what needs to fall into the earth and die in order for me to bear much fruit?
- ❖ With Holy Week fast approaching, Jesus is here speaking in the shadow of the valley of death. We remind ourselves that that without Good Friday there could be no Easter Sunday.
- ❖ In every death, there is life - this is the big message of Lent and of Easter. The grain of wheat will die and will through death nourish us with food. In the death of relationships, of health, of faith and all that may be dear to us there is always the invitation to deeper life. In our final death is the call to everlasting life.

Song: Acapella [Create in me](#)