Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?” (John 5: 27).

Fifth Sundy of Lent

Jer 31:31-34; Ps 51; Heb 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

A small detail in today’s Gospel opens up a key theme in the fourth Gospel about the anticipated expansion of the church beyond its Jewish roots into the Gentile world. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem for his final Passover, two of his disciples who have Greek names, Philip and Andrew, introduce him to some Greeks, also coming to celebrate the feast. The term “Greeks” indicated non-Jewish proselytes, or God-fearing Gentiles, whose renowned philosophical wisdom has led them to the threshold of faith. These outside seekers, in fact, represent the future of the church.

Jesus addresses these Greeks with a parable that directly addresses one of obstacles they had to overcome to accept discipleship. St Paul puts it succinctly -- the cross of Jesus was “folly to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews.” To ask anyone to give up their life in order to somehow gain greater life defied reason. Yet, Jesus uses the image of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground to demonstrate the fruitfulness of the cross at the heart of the redemptive mystery he will fulfill at Passover. He will fall to the ground and die, like the single grain that then multiplies to produce the harvest. The single grain that saves itself by withholding itself from

the sowing produces nothing. Those who want to be his disciples must also be willing to lose their lives in order to save their lives.

Perhaps the prospect of his own death in Jerusalem also seemed irrational and useless to Jesus as he and his disciples approached the city. As they passed through the fields where sowers were scattering seed, Jesus had his answer from the Spirit. The parable of the wheat falling to the ground was his gift of self-emptying love that would become God’s harvest of grace. His death on the cross made no sense except as an extravagant sign of God’s limitless love. No greater love than this, than to lay down your life for those you love.

We know that the Greeks did respond to the Gospel and that the early church exploded like a great harvest in Asia Minor and into the whole Mediterranean world, inspired by so many followers of Jesus willing to die for their faith. The parable of the wheat that falls to rise in glory is central to the Gospel. As we complete our Lenten journey and approach Holy Week, Jesus again asks us if we are still with him and ready to follow him in the sign of his cross, folly to some, a stumbling block to others, but to us, the path to glory.

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