

Sunday 21st March 2021 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

The reading for the fifth Sunday of Lent is **John 12: 20-33**, some Greeks wish to see Jesus – a reminder that Jesus is for all people. Seeing what lies ahead, Jesus is unsettled; but when God speaks, Jesus says that the voice is for his disciples' benefit, not his. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

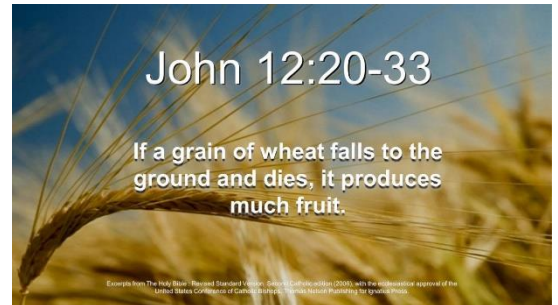
Call to worship

We come into the presence of Jesus to worship him today.
Let us make this a place where
all are welcome and all are included.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we know there is hardness in our hearts.
We find it hard to forgive
Hard to love others especially those who need it most
Hard to give freely
Hard to live as you would wish.

Write your ways on our hearts that we may serve you more fully. Amen



Assurance of pardon

Lord we give thanks that you will indeed forgive our iniquity and will remember our sin no more. Amen

Our Father who art in heaven...

Song Meekness and Majesty – Graham Kendrick

[\(417\) Meekness And Majesty - Graham Kendrick Lyric Video - YouTube](#)

John 12:20-33 - Jesus predicts his death

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 grain 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^[a] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (NIVUK)

Die to live

One of the things many people find objectionable about the Christian faith is the apparent emphasis on self-denial. When Jesus uses words like those from today's gospel reading - "Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal"- it is easy to hear the message as being very negative and life-denying.

It can seem as though our message becomes particularly bleak during this season of Lent. There is even more emphasis than usual on rooting out the sin in our lives and giving up things in order to try to discipline our bodies and our minds. Sometimes we can fall into the trap of beginning to think of Christianity that way ourselves and seeing those disciplines of self-denial as an end in themselves rather than as arduous but still necessary means to an end. Sometimes we can forget that the promise of Jesus Christ is life in all its fullness and that any of his statements about self-denial and giving up your life can only be properly understood as a part of that bigger picture.

Perhaps the most helpful image Jesus gives us to enable us to better understand all this is the one also contained in our gospel reading. "Very truly, I tell you, a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces much fruit." Clearly Jesus is seeing a link between releasing our grip on life as we know it and receiving the gift of life in all its fullness.

To some extent this is just common sense, something we learned in childhood, but we still find it remarkably difficult to apply it to the various areas of our lives.

In early childhood we learn that you can't hold everything at once. Parents of young children watch this realisation dawning. In some ways, what Jesus is saying is as simple as that. It is not possible to have everything or be everything at the same time. You can't be a peace-maker and a fighter at the same time. You have to choose. You can't spend eighty hours a week at the office and have a healthy relationship with your children. You have to choose. You can't grow into the person you really want to be and refuse to change at the same time. You have to choose.

If you listen to people making resolutions each New Year's eve and you'll know that pretty much everyone has some sort of vision of the sort of person they'd like to be. What we don't often ask ourselves is what price we are willing to pay to see that vision turned into reality.

God has a vision of the sort of person He wants us to be, because God knows what we were created to be. God knows what we are capable of becoming and is even more acutely

aware than we are of how far short of that vision we actually are. And God is eager to see us growing into that vision and becoming the people we were created to be.

But God will not impose it on us. God will not ride rough-shod over our wills and force us to become something we are not willing to become. So God calls us and pleads with us to follow. God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ to show us what the vision looks like - to show us what it looks like when love and freedom and grace and peace reach the fullness of their potential in a human being. And in Jesus Christ God also shows us what it can cost to become that and live that way. And in the end the choice is ours.

If we agree, God will do much of the work within us. We are not left completely to our own devices to try to work it all out by ourselves. Given permission, the Holy Spirit will get to work within us and begin reconstructing us, transfiguring us into the fullness of the potential that was always within us. But the Spirit will not usually fight us. Any areas of our life where we are unwilling to relinquish our grip will remain no-go areas for God's Spirit. The more parts of our life we declare off-limits, consciously or unconsciously, the less God will have to work with to bring that vision to fulfilment and the more meagre the results will be.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, there is so much on our hearts that we wish to share with you, so much we would wish to bring before you.

Concerns of health, bereavement, economic struggles and social tensions.

We live in a world of greed of selfishness, a world of exploitation, repression, extremes of wealth and poverty. So many facing injustice, cruelty, exclusion. A world being destroyed by the emissions we create. Nations struggling to live in peace with one another.

May they all feel your presence in their times of need and Lord, Show us what we can do to sow the seeds of your love in these places.

Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Song Nothing but the blood of Jesus Keith & Kristyn Getty

[\(422\) Nothing but the Blood - YouTube](#)

Holy Communion – Fifth Sunday of Lent

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you have taken us by the hand,
and offered yourself to us in a sacred covenant.

Though we broke our vows to you and pursued evil,
in gracious love you offered us a new covenant
embodied in your Son, Jesus,
who was made perfect on the path of obedience,
even in the face of suffering.



Lifted up on a cross to die,
he has drawn all people to himself;
and raised from the dead,
he has become the source of eternal salvation
for all who live in obedience
to the new law you have written on our hearts.

***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.***

The Story of the Lord's Supper

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body'. Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' (Mark 14: 22-25)

The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia.*

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

Prayer after Communion

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son.

God with us, you have fed us with yourself and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin and refashion us by grace.

Blessing

May God's word indeed be written in all our hearts
and may we offer ourselves as seeds to be sown
so that the harvest may continue
and that our lives may indeed be fruitful.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us now and evermore. **Amen**



