

The Lord be with you:

**and also with you.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

as we gather we must recall the promises and warnings given to us in the Scriptures. Let us therefore examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Father, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests:

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

**Absolution** May God our Father forgive us our sins, and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** [A new Covenant]

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalms 119:9-16** Listen to a few verses of today's psalm as John Shera plays.

Your words have I hidden within my heart, that I should not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O Lord; O teach me your statutes,

**John 12:20-33** [Some Greeks wish to see Jesus]

Among those who went up to worship at the Passover festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## Sermon

May the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

The Flood hadn't destroyed the Israelites, but that was only due to the forgiveness of God. And now, Jeremiah tells us that God was going to try again to make a covenant between the Israelite people and himself. But as a Christian it looks as though that covenant hadn't done the needful either. Why? Because that's the reason God gave for sending his only Son, Jesus to redeem the world. Serious stuff, Covenants! Yet that doesn't really give us a lot of assistance in preparing us for the gospel reading. Because there's no narrative in today's Gospel! It reads like a random collection of one-liners. It looks like a rather forgettable reading. Why was it selected? I think the key is in verse 23 – Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”

Step back and look at the apparently unconnected bits and pieces of our passage again. Four things stand out for me: I call them pointers to Christ's Passion: “Among those were some Greeks”. They ask to see Jesus. But they never get to see him. Why not? Why on earth did John put this into his Gospel? To understand this I will quote from another Gospel – that of Matthew 10:5: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. Jesus' preaching was always to the Jews during his lifetime – evangelisation of the Gentiles did not belong to the earthly ministry of Jesus. It's a pointer that Jesus' followers should prepare to very soon extend the Good News of the gospel to all nations. After his crucifixion the imperative of evangelism changed: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt28:19)

We can pick up little signals of what John meant by this apparent non-sequitur: Greeks in this context meant “of non-Jewish birth”. The two disciples mentioned – Andrew and Philip – are both Greek names – the only two. They speak as representatives of the Gentile church to which John the writer of the gospel belonged.

Next, we should examine the subject of seeds and sowing. “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 is showing his theology, his belief that in Jesus' death his message will be spread widely; that Jesus' destiny of a sacrificial death and resurrection will attract followers from everywhere. The same imagery as that of God's promise to Abraham - that his descendants would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore.

Destiny – “What should I say – Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour”. John shows a Jesus who is totally obedient to his Father. This passage shows Jesus coming to the climax of his destiny, facing his death and resurrection with a determination that is not shown in Matthew's account of Jesus praying for release in the Garden of Gethsemane. I see this as our new Covenant; between God and the world.

Then we get a glimpse of God's Glory: “Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’. The crowd standing there heard it, and thought it was thunder.” Where have we glimpsed the same interaction between God and his Son before? At the baptism of Jesus – God spoke from heaven – “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”.

At the Transfiguration on the mountain-top – from the cloud there came a voice “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him”. Now, just before Jesus' arrest, the same indication comes from God that this man, Jesus, is God's Son, his glory. And John rubs the message in, in case we miss it – “This voice”, Jesus says, has come for your sake, not for mine”.

So, four things picked out of what might seem like a ho-hum mixum-gatherum of unconnected verses. These verses tell us that after his death and resurrection, the message of Jesus will be for all peoples and nations; that Jesus' death is his destiny; it is part of God's plan; and that Jesus is facing his destiny resolutely; God's glory is approaching – is very near.

I call these, four pointers to the Passion. They make sense of a lot of Christianity for me. As you prepare to mark the Passion of Christ in Holy Week, think of these pointers – pointers to what was about to happen with the Jesus movement.

It's really quite an important reading after all, isn't it?

Amen.

## The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

### **Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the fifth Sunday in Lent**

Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world;  
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Let us pray that Christ shall be glorified in the Church and in the world. Grant to your servant Church the zeal to bring all people to Christ and to make known his saving sacrifice of himself. Give her power to drive out evil.

*Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer*

Bless all who work to spread the gospel and offer their lives in its service. Guide the seekers after truth, and lead into the right way those who care only for the pleasures of this world and the satisfaction of their own lives.

*... hear our prayer*

Make us willing servants of the faith, helping those around us to find their way and be renewed in the power of Christ. By the power of the Cross may all divisions in our community be amended, and all hurts healed.

*... hear our prayer*

Have mercy on all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. We ask especially for all who have fallen victim to this COVID pandemic; those for whom life has been darkened by dread of infection and sickness; those who are currently carers of family members; those whose lives have been changed by our current instability. May they hear the divine voice of power and comfort, be relieved from their affliction and find new life after loss.

*... hear our prayer*

We pray for those who have died to this world. May they grow into the life of heaven where joy is endless and what has been offered on earth comes to perfect fruition

*.... hear our prayer*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever,

**Amen.**

**Dismissal:**

May God, who works miracles in our lives,  
fill you with his Spirit;  
and change you day by day to reflect his glory,  
until that day when you see him face to face.

**Amen.**

and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you always.

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