**5 Lent, March 22, 2015, Jer 31:31-34; Ps 51; Heb 5:5-10; John 12:20-33 , Rev Mary Trainor**

Here's the process, and it's not always pretty. It is dirty, in fact, dirty as in soil. A seed gets planted in the ground. The seed is rarely pretty; it's usually wrinkled and brown, with a hard seed coat. That seed coat, because of enzymes in soil organisms, gradually cracks open. If water and nutrients are present, what's inside begins to respond. Cells divide, the energy coming from the stored tissue within; the little seed leaves expand and start growing up. A tiny root with root hairs emerges and grows down into the soil, in response to gravity. Nothing is seen for a while on top of the soil, but after a few days or weeks new life emerges: the little green shoot pops up above the soil.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the metaphor of a seed to talk about His imminent crucifixion. This passage occurs right before the Last Supper, and after Palm Sunday. Outsiders who have learned about Jesus come and ask "***to see Jesus***" and instead of Jesus saying, "**hey, I'm right over here"** (*which one would expect*) He makes a big deal of this - and responses with a reference to His death: "***The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified....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***." Jesus talks a lot in this Gospel about death. Death is not something we want to hear about or think about. Death to us is so final, so dark. Yet, Jesus defeated death in the resurrection - but He had to go through crucifixion first. So, in order to truly SEE Jesus, one has to not only needs to recognize the person of Jesus, but also needs to see the cross, and the love for us that the cross represents.

Jesus is saying that now, His time has come. But oh my, Jesus didn't want to die! He said, "***Now my soul is troubled***." But He knows it must be done, "***it is for this reason that I have come to this hour***." Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus said, ***"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."***(John 10:10) Jesus was a healthy, vibrant 33 year old man who had friends, a mother to care for, a profession. He didn't want to die! But this is why He came; He said, "***it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.***" And it was all about love: love, love, love.

Jesus tells us a whole lot about how our lives will be, if we choose to believe in Him and follow Him:

* He will draw all people to Himself
* When we follow Him, we will have "eternal life" (today's reading from Hebrews reinforces this. It says, "***He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obeyed Him***.")
* Jesus won the battle against evil ("***ruler of this world***"). When we follow Him, live in Him, love Him, receive His love, we have no need to fear Satan.
* We are not alone, we will never be alone. Jesus will be with us always, as we follow Him. He will be right with us, no matter what.

When people looks at seeds, they would not automatically know about all the new life, beauty, growth, fruit, and nourishment that comes from seeds. They have to be taught or see a demonstration or grow seeds themselves. People who look at or hear about Jesus might not know about ALL that He is either -- unless someone tells them, unless someone teaches them. We are all here to learn about Jesus and beginning a week from today, we all have the opportunity to journey with Jesus through Holy Week in our various services here at St. John's. This Gospel is the precursor, getting us ready for Holy Week.

Just as the seed cracks open in order to have life emerge, Jesus had to go to the cross. And we need to become vulnerable, to open up a crack, to make a place for Jesus. Vulnerable is defined as: "**capable of or susceptible to being wounded or hurt.**" We are practiced at hiding our vulnerabilities, because in our culture this is perceived as weakness -- and yet it is just the opposite in God's Kingdom here on earth. We prefer to think about the all powerful, all mighty, all perfect God. That is what the people were looking for in that parade into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Most of the hymns we sing emphasize this transcendent God, yet our God is both an omnipotent God and a God who chose to be vulnerable. Jesus was born in a manger, a helpless child wrapped in rags and then soon forced to live with His family as a refugee in Egypt. Jesus, on the way to the cross on the cross, suffered real pain and humiliation -- beyond what most of us could withstand. Talk about vulnerable! Earlier in the book of Hebrews (4:15-16) it says, "***for we do not have a high priest (i.e., Jesus) incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, et without sin. Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help***." Jesus, fully divine and fully human, models human vulnerability for us. We can't experience the abundant life that the real Jesus has for us without cracking open -- like a seed has to do before it germinates. We resist cracking open, becoming vulnerable, because it is a risk -- but there is no need to fear. God is with us.

If you want to see Jesus, see Him at the cross. If you wish to see Jesus, desire Him, listen to Him, follow Him, talk with Him, and put Him ahead of everything else in your life. If you want to see Jesus, you can take the risk to crack open and be vulnerable with Him, for it is through that crack that the Light, the Love, the amazing grace of Jesus flows into us.

Yeah, it is finally spring - and we get to plant seeds and see green emerge!

Yeah, it is finally spring -- and Jesus is ready to plant His light and love into you in a new, fresh way. As you look at seeds this spring, as you plant seeds in your garden, be reminded about how Jesus gave His life that you might have life; be reminded that Jesus wants to meet you just as you are in order to give you new life. Amen.