

**GOSPEL**

*Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus' words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.*

<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

<sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

I can remember growing up an era in which there was only one late night television show that was worth watching. Every night, after the 11 o'clock news Johnny Carson came on, and even when I was little kid I would try to finagle a way to stay up and watch him. Then as I hit my college years the David Letterman show came on after him and I became a super fan of Letterman. I already was, from when he had guess hosted on Carson. Some of you may recall the great late-night battle that occurred when Johnny Carson retired. Many of you know that it was Jay Leno who replaced Johnny Carson, but many thought it should've went to David Letterman. Behind the scenes the transition was anything but smooth because the bypassing of Letterman caused a major wrinkle. Even once the decision to go with Leno was announced, behind the scenes, among the NBC executives, a division arose as to whether to replace Leno with Letterman or let Letterman go and have him go to another network and ultimately be the competition. Not only was this an issue for this network, but it had become an issue for all of the media world and was receiving a lot of attention. Pressure on the Letterman people, the Leno people, CBS, and NBC was enormous. The meetings and discussions over the event seemed endless. One time, however, at NBC there was an important meeting that would shape the outcome of the entire matter. It would be in January, and it would involve all the powerful people to get together on a conference call and decide the fate a late night television. Jay Leno knew the meeting was going to the take place and he had an idea. On the night of the meeting he secretly went into the executive offices; there he hid in the closet. He spent most of the night hiding in this little cubbyhole of a closet as he overheard the entire meeting. He knew what people really thought of him, he heard all their opinions, he knew what and who was for

him, and he knew who was against him. From that meeting, he had a pretty good idea where the decision was going to go; and used it as an advantage around the people he was going to deal with.

What would you do if you had the same opportunity? Would it be tempting to do that if we have the same opportunity in our lives? Would it be interesting to hear what people actually thought about us? Would it be more interesting to know which way things are going to go in our own future?

Many of us would really want to know what was ahead, so that we can make more effective decisions today. Maybe we would be more responsible, maybe we would be more irresponsible. Perhaps we could think we could be more controlling of our lives in the world around us. We would have the power to decide upon the things that demand our time, the relationships we encounter, and how we interact with others as a whole, would be impacted if we knew our future. It seems sometimes in our life, that it is our quest to control our own destiny, to do it our way, to be truly independent. Of course, most of us are rational to know that we do not control many things in our lives, and often we grip really tight to control anything that we feel we have influence over.

In our gospel text, Jesus alludes to his coming death. He talks about how the hour has come for the Son of Man. Then he even adds this line: "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." These are also very difficult words. In the season of Lent, in the season in which we are reminded that we are dust in the dust we shall return, this is reinforced with today's text. It tells us, reminds us, that

we are going to go into the earth but then also adds the strange twist about those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life will keep it for eternal life. This seems like an oxymoron. Because there are sometimes in my life where I love my life, I love it a lot; celebrating the birth of a new son, just a little over six months ago and watching him grow up is a special kind of joy that makes me want to live each day, that makes me want to see the gloriousness of a human being growing up in God's creation. It wants me to keep living. Isn't this loving life? Is this what Jesus is talking about when he says if you love your life, you're going to lose it? What does he mean, I should hate my life in order to save it? This doesn't make sense. But again, going back to Lent, and how we started it, and how we talked about it being a period of time in the church in which we re-center our lives on God; Jesus here is reminding us what is the foundation of our lives: if we build upon ourselves, meaning trying to build statues and monuments to ourselves, and begin to think we are the most valuable thing to ever walk the earth and therefore we deserve everything; if we build our lives upon this foundation we will certainly lose it. God is talking about hating our life in the sense of knowing where our priorities lie. God is not advocating here that we hate our individual being, for God created us out of love, but rather Jesus is reminding us of our core. It is a message of contradiction for us which makes being a Christian not always an easy thing to be. It is about sometimes reminding ourselves of the ultimate sacrifice God has already given to us. Sometimes this is difficult to hear because it tends to upset the apple cart of our view of life, our perspective on others around us, our perspective on politics and the world. It tends to agitate and disturb the neat package that we sometimes wrap up our Christian faith in. Christianity isn't about simply a nice convenience for

us, it is a life of challenge. Jesus is reminding his followers that the promise can at times be very inconvenient for us. We often think we know things need to go a certain way, but often that is not the way our faith would have things go. And we are forced to decide.

The late Frank Gifford told a story that he called the most inspirational moment he ever experienced in sports. It did not happen when he played football or when he was covering a Monday night football game. Instead the moment came when he would cover the special Olympics. During that time, the Special Olympics were in the very earliest of years and the ABC network decided to give it some television coverage. Frank Gifford was the announcer. When the gun went off for the 100 yard dash, one boy broke way ahead of the pack. There was no question that he was going to win. Leading by at least 10 yards the young boy suddenly stumbled, staggered, and sprawled on the track. Gifford said his own heart froze. But as a kid in second place caught up with him and start to run by, he stopped, glanced, headed to finish line and then back the rest the field. Then he went back and leaned over and picked up the fallen boy as the others race by. The two of them came across the finish line with their arms around each other - one last and the other next to last. Gifford said that moment touched him and demonstrated to him that these kids had much to teach the rest of the world.

It has something to teach us about living out the Christian life as well. The path of Christian discipleship is not about convenience. It very often engages our Christian calls when we least want it to, when we have many other things going on. Maybe even when we are very happy with the direction our lives are going. In our Sunday school we been talking about some of the prophets of the Old Testament. For most of these prophets

they too had a life they were living before God's call came upon them and change their entire course of direction. This is when the faith challenge becomes strong: "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." May we be so bold to strive to be open to where the Spirit may be leading our lives. Amen.