

John 12:23-27

March 10, 2019

“I Tell You the Truth...

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

If One Dies, It Produces Life for Many”

Rev. Brent Hartwig

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

**[Introduction]**

The city was abuzz! It was during what we *NOW CALL* Holy Week.

Each year tourists from all over would come.

Each year tourists would stand in line with their kids,

waiting to see the usual attractions. It was like Disney World!

But this year, there was one attraction –

one attraction that was getting more attention than anything else. It was Jesus.

Beginning on Sunday, people had lined the streets,

waving palm branches and paving the way with coats.

**BUT** With all the crowds, it was hard to see Jesus. Not everyone got a glimpse!

So, wanting a peek of their own,

some foreigners tugged on the sleeves of one of Jesus’ disciples:

“We would like to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21).

It seemed like a noble request. Best construction, it was.

And yet the way Jesus responded to this request was ...

Well, intriguing.

That he answers very clearly.

*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*

**WHAT?**

Is Jesus just completely changing the subject?

“What’s that Philip? Oh, some Greeks want to see me?

Well, uh . . . let me tell you something about farming.”

We don’t know if Jesus granted their request.

And we have got to be asking ourselves... what’s the point?

You see ... Jesus does not want us to consider so much,

“What do *YOU WANT* to see in Jesus?”

but rather, “What does *JESUS WANT* you to see?”

**[out of death comes life]**

*“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

I know this is talking about wheat, but think of a cob of corn.

Weather and soil conditions do play a factor,

but an average ear has about 16 rows, with 40 kernels per row.

That’s over 600 kernels of corn, all from one seed that is placed in the ground, where it dies in germination, decays, and then sprouts.

Miraculously, **out of death comes life.**

Jesus knew that was not just the case with a kernel of wheat or corn.

Jesus knew that was true of him.

In fact, that was the very reason for which he was born.

He was born to die. How completely opposite that is of us!

Yes, because of sin, we will die. The wages of sin is still death.

But that’s not our purpose. God made us to live.

On the sixth day of creation,

God breathed into Adam “the breath of *LIFE*,” not the “breath of *DEATH*.”

But for Jesus, flip it around. He took on human life, so that he could die.

He inhaled the breath of life, so that he willingly could exhale his breath in death.

*“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

Jesus didn’t want to be the single seed of eternal life.

Jesus wanted and wants fellowship with us.

Isn’t that humbling,

especially considering how many times we try to hide our fellowship with God?

Oh sure, I want to be with God on Sunday morning when I’m in church,	but I’m not so sure I want fellowship with God when I decide to sleep in.
Oh sure, we want fellowship with God at our wedding ceremonies,	but I’m not so sure we want fellowship with God when our married eyes wander.
Oh sure, we want fellowship with God as we bring our babies to be baptized,	but I’m not so sure we want fellowship with God when we fail to make him a priority in our children’s lives.
Oh sure, we want fellowship with God; we want him standing right beside us when we’re in times of trouble,	but I’m not so sure we want God standing next to us when we get into trouble by our own actions.

But Jesus craves that closeness.

Jesus wanted to bring life to us and wants to share life with us.

He knew if that was going to happen, sin needed to be paid for,  
because sin is the big separator.

If sin was paid by him, if sin were paid by the innocent death of the Son of God,  
he could give us life. And so he did it.

NOW, that doesn't mean it would be a walk in the park for Jesus.

As he looked ahead to the scourges ripping his back,  
the thorns pressing-in on his skull, and  
the nails piercing through his hands,  
he was troubled.

*"Now my heart 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."*

So determined. So resolute. Because he knew that out of death comes life.

But that's not all that Jesus wants us to see.

**[*out of life comes death*]**

After giving his illustration of the wheat, Jesus continues,

*"I tell you the truth ... The man who loves his life will lose it,  
while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

We love our lives. I'm not saying we like everything about our lives.

We may not like our jobs, or our health. But we love our lives.

Let me rephrase that: by nature, we love ourselves.

Again, we may not like everything about ourselves.

We may not like our hair or our height,  
but by nature, we love and live for ourselves.

Now this is corny... but...

Instead of seeing ourselves as kernels, k-e-r-n-e-l-s, produced by Jesus,  
we like to see ourselves as colonels, c-o-l-o-n-e-l-s, of our lives.

I call the shots. I'm number one. I am in charge.

Whatever is done in my best interests *THAT* is what matters.

That's who we are by nature.

Watch a baby—have you seen anything so selfish!

Waah—feed me!

Waah—change me!  
Waah—I'm tired!  
Waah—rock me!

And by nature, things don't change with age.  
What am *I*-going to get out of this relationship? Waah!  
What am *I* going to get out of this job? Waah!  
When are you going to give *me* attention?  
How do you think *I* feel?  
How do you think *I* look? Waah! Waah! Waah!

It's so easy to be naval-gazers. But Jesus changes our perspective.  
By God's grace, when we realize that through Jesus' death we have eternal life,  
the life we loved—the life that was all about me—doesn't look so appealing now.

In fact, it begins to die.  
That's why I can say not only out of death comes life,  
but also **out of life comes death.**  
The life we get from our Savior means death to our old self.

**BUT** Let's be real.  
The old self won't die easily. It gets a second, third, even fourth wind.  
It will be on life support all your years on earth, gasping for air.  
But the life you have from Jesus will give you power to withstand the old self.  
And one day, when Jesus calls you home to his side,  
he'll pull the plug on your old self. It can't and won't go with you.  
The eternal life you have will mean death to your old self.

**[Conclusion]**

So yeah! Just like the Greeks, we want to see Jesus. And we will!  
We'll see him in a bunch of different lights.  
We'll see him humbly, yet majestically riding into town.  
We'll see him graciously handing us a cup saying, "Take drink."  
We'll see him bound, on trial, and on a tree.  
Finally, we'll see him rise triumphant from the grave.  
Sometimes we'll like what we see. Other times we'll cringe at what we see.  
But remember, it's not about what *WE* want to see in Jesus,  
it's about what Jesus wants us to see.  
He wants us to see that his death means our life,  
and our new life means death to our old one. I tell you the truth. Amen.

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REJOICE always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (1 Thess. 5:16–18)

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