

Midweek 6, March 25, 2015

I Tell You the Truth . . . If One Dies, It Produces Life for Many

Text: John 12:23-27 (20-22)

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Dear Friends in Christ,

In the verses immediately preceding our sermon text, St. John mentioned that some Greeks had come to “worship at the Feast,” at the Passover. No doubt, they had heard about Jesus. Now they wanted to see him.

Pastors have an inside joke that plays on the Greeks request, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” When we hear a sermon that never mentions our Savior by name, or stresses godly living rather than our Lord’s cross, we cry out to the preacher quietly even when we want to shout, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

Jesus teaches what we need to see in him. He used an example from agriculture; the kernel of wheat that dies in the ground, and thus produces many seeds. What does Jesus want us to see? Jesus answered very clearly the Greeks request that Andrew and Peter relayed to him. He answered the relayed request with one of his “I tell you the truth” statements. Now, the text. (Read 12:23-27)

Jesus wants us to see that out of death comes life. Jesus used the example of a kernel of wheat, but think of an ear of corn. Growing conditions will play a factor, but any guesses as to how many kernels of corn are on one cob? Over 600 kernels of corn, all from one seed the farmer places into the soil, where it dies in germination, decays, and then sprouts. Miraculously, **out of death comes life**, abundant life.

Jesus knew that was true of him. “For this very reason I came to this hour.” Jesus was born to die. Death was his purpose for living. You could say we are born to die. Yet death is not the purpose for my life but it is the certain result because of sin.

In the beginning, God made man to live. On the sixth day of creation, God breathed into Adam “the breath of life,” not the “breath of death.” However, for Jesus, flip it around. He took on humanity, so that he could die. The Son of God inhaled the breath of life, so that he willingly could as the Son of Man exhale his breath in death.

Jesus would die for what purpose? “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 did not want to be the single seed on the

ear of eternal life. Jesus wants your kernel and my kernel right next to him on that cob. The many seeds are the many believers who are the church.

There are many times that fellowship with Jesus lines up like the rows of kernels on an ear of corn. I want to be with God on Sunday morning in worship, rather than sleep in. I am with God at my wedding and want continued fellowship with God rather than have my married eyes wander.

Our babies have fellowship with God at Holy Baptism. We seek continuing fellowship with God when we make Jesus a priority in our children’s lives. We have fellowship with God, who stands right beside us in times of trouble, and want God standing next to us rather

than go off by ourselves and get in trouble by our own actions.

Like peas in a pod, or kernels of corn on an ear, or a kernel of wheat that dies to produce many seeds, Jesus craves that closeness with us. Jesus wanted to bring us life. Jesus wants to share life with us. Jesus paid for sin because sin is the big separator, like a corn-sheller, taking the kernels off the cob.

Jesus died to pay for sin. It would not be a walk in the park for Jesus. As he looked ahead to the scourges ripping his back, the thorns pressing on his skull, and the nails piercing 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 Jesus knew that out of death comes life. That is not all Jesus wants us to see.

After giving his illustration of the wheat, Jesus continues his “I tell you the truth” paragraph, “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 may not love everything in our lives, but we love our lives. Our lives are God’s gifts to us. At the same time, my sinful nature tempts me to love the things in my life, and particularly myself, even more than I love God. Satan tempts me to my temporal life more than the eternal life Jesus created for me in his resurrection.

If I love living here and living for myself, I must realize that I will lose the new life for my soul I have in fellowship with Christ. Jesus said you cannot love both God and the earthly things that are temporary. Jesus does not mean lose life at the moment of death. He means forfeit my soul.

By God’s grace, when we realize that through Jesus’ death we have eternal life, this life does not look so appealing. It begins to die. That is why I can say not only out of death comes life, but also **out of life comes death**. The new spiritual life we get from our Savior means death to our old self.

When my soul dies to love for this world, and dies to self-love, I will keep my soul for eternal life. That truth does not sound appealing when we listen with the ear of our old self. Turn that ear off and listen with your New Man ear.

Imagine a life empowered to say “no” to temptations? A life to chase away the devil even though he is like a lion. A life where my grave looks like an entrance door to some grand place instead of an exit from a place that seems to be grand.

That is my life when the old self is dying. When I lose my life, I am free to receive eternal life. I am free to serve a loving Savior who willingly died for me. I am free to serve a living Savior in whose righteousness I receive honor from my heavenly Father.

The old self will not die easily. However, the life you have from Jesus gives you power to withstand the old self. One day, when Jesus calls you home to his side, your old self cannot and will not go with you. The eternal life you have will mean death to your old self.

We stand on the brink of Holy Week. With the Greeks, we want to see Jesus. We will see him in several different lights; humbly, yet majestically riding into town. We will see him graciously hand us a piece of bread and a cup saying, “Take eat, take drink.” We will see him bound, on trial, and on a tree.

Finally, we will see Jesus triumphant from the grave. Remember, it is 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. <SDG>

