

Hebrews 5:5-10**John 12:20-33****Introduction**

I'm very fond of avocado pears. The problem is that if you eat a lot of them you end up with a pile of their big shiny stones. Once, years ago, rather than throwing the stone away I put it in a plant pot in some compost and watered it regularly to see what would happen. Apparently nothing happened. I waited for well over a year and there was no sign at all of growth. Finally, impatient and wanting to use the pot for something else I turned it out and found that the stone had in fact sprouted and had produced roots and a shoot. So I put it straight back into the pot and continued to nurture it until it finally grew into a large, strong healthy plant which we called Arthur – Arthurcado!! Arthur lived with me happily for many years – but we nearly lost him because I didn't have the patience to wait for the apparently dead seed to grow.

A seed appears dead until it goes into the ground and then develops shoots and produces life. That is the picture Jesus is using here though to begin with what he says seems to be very strange.

He has arrived in Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of his life. He has been anointed by Mary in a symbolic preparation for his death, he has entered Jerusalem on a donkey, another symbolic action that proclaimed him as the promised Messiah, he was acclaimed by the crowd and John records the Pharisees saying, "Look the whole world is following him". Amongst those who had heard about him and who wanted to see him were some Greeks, who were obviously attracted to Israel's God and the Jewish festivals that celebrated his deeds, and had come to Jerusalem to worship during the festival.

Andrew and Philip came to Jesus to tell him that these men wanted to see him. But, instead of saying, "How wonderful! Bring them here and I'll talk to them!" Jesus goes off into a meditative monologue about seeds and plants, about life and death, about servants and masters. Why? What is he saying?

The fullest answer to that question comes at the end of the passage in verse 32 when he says, "*When I am lifted up I will draw all people to me*". In other words if the Greeks want to benefit fully from what he has been sent into the world to do then his best course is to carry on and complete the work the father has given him. Only by this strange calling of his will the non-Jewish world, the Greek speaking world, come to gain the truest and deepest access to him that God had intended. They wouldn't just see him as they asked to but would be drawn to him by the powerful love of God, drawn into fellowship with him and new life through him.

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So Jesus' strange answer involving seeds falling into the ground and dying is the beginning of his answer. He tells them that his time has come to die. It is now that he will begin to fulfil his purpose and make it possible for all people to come to God.

One of my favourite books of all time is the Tolkein Lord of the Rings trilogy. I was therefore slightly nervous when Peter Jackson turned it into three blockbusting films. Filming a book can destroy one's own visual idea of the characters and world that are portrayed in the pages and can take away some of the mystery and magic. However I think he did an extremely good job, not least in the portrayal of Gollum.

One of the best scenes in the film, for me, was Gollum struggling with his inner self. The debate he had with himself about the precious. You could hear the two voices debating and see the two characters involved as he struggled, between his deep inner compulsion to own the precious ring, and his commitment to help Frodo on his quest.

Most of us are familiar with inner struggles. The internal debate between what we feel we should do and what we really want to do. Some of us find ourselves turning things over in our minds at night unable to sleep tossing this way and that - should I do this, should I do that. However, inner turmoil isn't often something that we associate with Jesus. He mostly appears in the Gospels to be someone who knows his own mind and has a clear idea of where he is going and what he is trying to achieve.

He was not afraid to tell people what his priorities were. At the wedding in Cana he told his mother "What is this to me. My time has not yet come" Again he told his brothers, "My time has not yet come" and when approached for help by a Syro Phoenecian woman he told her he had come specifically to the people of Israel, but less politely than that!! However we reach the point in today's Gospel reading when Jesus recognised that the time had come. The time he had been preparing for and working towards all of his earthly life - and at this point he finds himself in inner turmoil.

"Now my heart is troubled - and what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, do not let this hour come upon me?" All his life Jesus had been working towards this moment yet, now, faced with the reality of what that would entail for him, we see that he is troubled deep within. Jesus was, after all the word made flesh. Weak flesh, human flesh, flesh that shrank from suffering as we all would. His natural instinct as a weak human being was to ask if there were any way that this could be avoided.

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The other gospels don't show us this internal troubled discussion that Jesus has with himself until we get to the Garden of Gethsemane. John has brought it forward so that we see it now, in Jerusalem, before his arrest.

This discussion with himself is deeply moving, the weak human voice "*Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me?'*" Then the committed, obedient voice of the Son of God – '*But that is why I came – so that I might go through with this hour of suffering'* and the resolution found in his commitment to honouring the Father. '*Father, bring glory to your name!*' Jesus was totally committed to glorifying his father. He had come all this way, prepared the ground, spoken of the father's will and how the world is to be saved; and is he now going to ask for a change of plan?

His troubled heart knows that there is danger ahead, but he also knows that it is through that danger and only through that danger that the glory of God will shine out on the whole world. So his answer to the turmoil in his heart and mind is a prayer of commitment and submission. "*Father, glorify your name!*" Jesus looked death squarely in the face. He knew what it was going to cost him to bring us into relationship with himself and such was his commitment to us and to his Father's purpose that having faced the pain ahead he was able to embrace it.

So what can we learn from this passage and what relevance does it have for our daily lives? Well I think that often we are so familiar with the fact that Jesus died on the cross for us that it can lose its impact, its power to impress us or shock us. We somehow have learned to take it for granted that that is what he did and even developed a 'take it or leave it' attitude to our relationship with him. When we feel like it we follow him but when other things distract us and take our attention then we turn away from our commitment to him.

When we listen to this passage and hear the turmoil, the fear and confusion in his voice we are faced with Jesus the man, the very essence of him. This is our God who was so committed to rebuilding a relationship with the people that he made that he came from heaven to earth to become one of us, to offer himself up for us. The simple act of doing that is enormously costly. Jesus let go of so much in order to come to earth to die for us – and that was before he even faced his death on the cross.

As we listen to Jesus' anguish and pain and realise, "That was for me. That is how Jesus felt about rescuing me. That is how much God loves me" How do we respond? How can we respond? Can I encourage you to take time to think of God's love for you, to receive his love for you and

Readings

Jesus' Internal struggle

Fowlmere –live stream

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this Easter re-commit yourself to following him with all your mind and heart and will.