

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

March 21, 2021

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B

The readings this week:

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 ◦ Psalm 51:1-12
- Hebrews 5:5-10 ◦ John 12:20-33

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Seeds of Light

John 12:20-36 *Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor..."*

It's all a little confusing.

Seeds falling into the dark earth, germinate and break through the soil to the light and air as new plants.

God speaks, and most the people who hear it explain it away as thunder.

The eternal Messiah turns out to be the mere mortal Son of Man, who is going to die.

He speaks of gathering gloom but nevertheless encourages his followers to keep moving forward while there is enough light to see the way.

It is quite confusing. Something like those Zen Koans that defy logical thinking and pause the rational mind just long enough for truth and realization to break through.

Yet when I drop all the expectations I am continually projecting onto God, when I abandon what Thomas Keating calls, "my programs for happiness", I realise that Jesus is speaking quite plainly about plain things.

Death and life are a natural cycle through which the propagation of species occurs. There is no place for selfishness in the natural order. Little seeds packed with genetic coding cannot hold out for their own devised destiny or reward, but in the surrender of their very identity and existence they become the origin of new and verdant life. The caterpillar spins its own tomb and

emerges as another being fecund with eggs to propagate life. The master dies and the disciples are thrust into being conduits of the truth he taught.

And yes, sometimes I mistake God's voice for thunder and vice versa. That's all right. God will speak again just as surely as cumulus nimbus forms on a summer afternoon. Just maybe, lightning will strike twice.

If my messiah were not the mere mortal, son of man he would not be able to relate to my existence, my fears and my horror about my own death. This mortal Jesus, may not be the one who delivers the political liberation expected by Israel, nor does he perform according to my whimsical prayer demands. But I will tell you what he does in his own mortal life: he sets me free by showing how to be completely human and as that human how to open completely to the divine.

It is a husk breaking, skin shedding, thunderous and dim mystery, I'll tell you.

Sometimes all my Greek philosophy and general sophistry is of little use. It doesn't get me to meet Jesus.

But when I close my eyes and still my mind from all its reasoning and overthinking, I notice that I can see dimly in the dark. Just enough light to take another step closer to his divine heart.

He who hides from all my argumentation, is the very one who shines a torch in the dark labyrinth of my prayer.

~ Peter Woods, [The Listening Hermit](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)

God's people were guilty of worshipping false gods. What are the idols that tempt people today? God's people sacrificed their own children to the detestable Canaanite gods. What parallels do you see in contemporary society? What biblical commandments do you think are hardest for modern people to keep? Fractured relationships are hard to repair. God demonstrated unimaginable mercy by offering a fresh start to his estranged love. How does this inform our own need to offer our loved ones a new beginning? What are some examples of how you have received divine forgiveness? What are some examples of how you have granted human forgiveness? How are we still waiting for the complete fulfillment of this promise? What will the world look like when everybody has the law written on their hearts and minds? [Bethany Covenant Church](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 51:1-12](#)

How do we practice repentance in the church today? How have you experienced it, both publicly and privately? What does this Psalm teach us about how we should practice repentance and confession in the church? How should the fact that every sin is to be understood as an act of rebellion against God affect our attitude towards sin? Many of us struggle to see sin in such serious terms. We often become indifferent or at least apathetic about it. Why is that? How can we learn to take sin as seriously as it ought to be taken? What consequence of sin is David most concerned about here? What does this reveal about his heart towards God and his priorities? a. Have there been or are there areas of your life where you struggle to believe that God can cleanse you? Why is that? What are some areas of your life where you have seen God's cleansing and renewing work already? [Discussion Questions](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

O God, who makes all things new,
new stars, new dust, new life;
take my heart,
every hardened edge and measured beat,
and create something new in me.
I need your newness, God,
the rough parts of me made smooth;
the stagnant, stirred;
the stuck, freed;
the unkind, forgiven.
And then, by the power of your Spirit,
I need to be turned toward Love again. Amen.

~ by Pamela C. Hawkins, *The Awkward Season: Prayers for Lent*, [Prayers and Creeds](#)

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.
Old men ought to be explorers
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise.
In my end is my beginning.

~T.S.Eliot 1888-1965, 'East Coker' (last lines)
via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Hebrews 5:5-10](#)

Have you ever been asked to represent someone? How important is it that the person that represents you really knows you and your circumstances? How did Christ become qualified to represent us before God? How is Jesus able to identify with our weaknesses and trials? Have you ever been required to make recompense for something you had done? How moved are you when you realize that God sacrificed His Son on your behalf to pay the penalty you could never pay? Can you recall a time Jesus offered up prayers and petitions with fervent tears and cries? How was He submissive? How important should it be for us to offer prayers to God? How should we demonstrate our submissiveness to God? [The Bridge](#)

___ 4th Reading: [John 12:20-33](#)

Do you think we will necessarily suffer because we are Christians? Remember that until now, Jesus' ministry has mainly been in small towns and villages. But he has just come into Jerusalem in a "parade," and now even non-Jews want to know about him! Why might this (interested Greeks) be exciting news to Philip and Andrew? Jesus says he will "be glorified" – what might the disciples think this means? What does Jesus say it means? What did the voice from heaven say – who was this message for, and what did it confirm about Jesus? Jesus' work is not about gaining more popularity – like holding parades (Triumphal Entry) and attracting new crowds (like these Greeks who came). What is the reason that Jesus says he came? Jesus uses the example of a seed: When it "dies," the outer shell breaks and falls away so that the tiny plant inside might grow. What does this mean in Jesus' case? What is he talking about for himself? What might it mean to "love our lives" – what kind of things might we cling to? Do these things grow and bear lasting fruit? What is it that's growing inside us? How must we allow the other things to "die" so that this inner part may grow and bear fruit? [Faith Element](#)