

Lent 5 - The grain of wheat falls to the earth - Fr Michael

What a wonderful Gospel reading for Lent 5, for Lent any time, indeed for all time. Jesus seems to be saying, "If you really want to see me, if you want to see the real Jesus, Jesus as he is, the only way to do it is to see him as a divine seed that goes into the ground and dies; but in the very process of dying, he shall rise a new being, a new seed, and will bring forth new and abundant other seeds." But, Hey! Jesus is not just a seed - he **is** the seed - a person - and we are the other seeds - we join with him as members of his body - we also must die - we must go through what he goes through - so that we can bring new seed, new life out of all we are and all we do.

As we travel through the last day of Lent and into Passiontide we prepare ourselves to not only witness with Christ, to walk alongside Christ Jesus but go through a death with him so that we are changed. We are changed once again into Easter people, people who have resurrection joy in their hearts. But in order for that change to happen we must commit ourselves to Christ's passion and death. "If you serve me, follow me," Jesus says, "where I am there will my servant be." Servanthood speaks of humility, of giving in service to God and to each other.

Wow, what a message from Jesus to right where we are now! Lent this year has been a time for reflection on the quality and quantity of our love. The readings have taken us from the wilderness temptations and our reflections on self-conquest, to, transfiguration and change, to, a reflection that sin is turning our back on God and putting myself first, to last week, Mothering Sunday and about how we love each other, for Lent is the time for purifying and perfecting our love. We also saw that love is costly, as Mary found out.

However, there has been an overarching theme here at St Peter's, of change - transformation - of not standing still, but of moving somewhere. The aim of this was for us all to question where we are, what we are doing and importantly, where we are going - the future. The future can be scary - the unknown is scary - but it is always easier and better if we are not alone. Although I have missed the experience, having a different experience of my own with the good people of All Hallows - I do know that some experimenting, some challenging has gone on! Being together is at the heart of the challenge. The whole body of Christ being together, loving each other, caring for each other, teaching and guiding each other is what you have been exposed too. The whole body of Christ means not just the adults but everyone from 0 to 100, hence the title of this Lenten theme, 'It takes a church to raise a child.'

Young people crave community - that is why social media really fires them up - being connected to friends and even to strangers is exciting and is educational - we learn from each other - we learn life's lessons by listening to each other and by sharing. Young people want someone to admire, someone to look up too and we can all do that for each other - in conversation with some of you as I continue to settle in here at St Peter's, I am astounded by the experiences some of you have had - the places you have lived, the careers you have or have had. Talking to each other builds community and community builds faith and trust - it builds love. Young people are just like us older members - we all want to be accepted and we want to love and be loved.

Now the question we are asking ourselves this Lenten time - is - are we modelling the love of Christ well? Is the act of segregating our community into age related groups always the right answer? Do we value our children and young people by doing that? I would question whether they feel valued, if they leave the building, as if they are a nuisance or the

teaching going on in church is only for adults. I question whether it might feel like school - going out to learn something - and not like a family who eat, talk and socialise together. Perhaps, children don't need more school on their weekend, one of their days off.

At college I did a short course for a week at which Mary Hawes, the Church of England's National Children and Youth Advisor spent time with us. She pointed out that children on the whole do what their parents say. They come to church with their parents as directed, but as they transition to the teenage years and seek independence - they only keep coming to church if they feel welcome, valued and are at the heart of what is going on. In other words young people need to own church - feel it is where they belong and find relevance in their lives. Now that doesn't mean theology, deep meaning, the answers to life - it means love. The rest will follow, all in good time as they question and seek advice - as they talk to each other and to you and me.

Mary points out that young members of our churches, desire to be seen as 'equal members of the body of Christ, not members-in-training, or waiting, - but fellow pilgrims. Inclusion is important, not always being segregated by age, but being in community where the generations worship and serve alongside each other; a need for a non-judgemental space in which to explore questions of faith and life, space to discover and shape an identity that might not conform to adult expectations. ... (churches need to), build bridges between generations, (so that the young), are part of the vision-making of the church. (Mary Hawes, 2018)

She points out that none of this is expensive - too often in the past churches felt they had to pay an expert, a youth worker, to excite the young, but that didn't always work. All you need is commitment, from every member that we will try and build relationships, to be hospitable and generous - really it's just what a family does. A family eats together, talks and cares for every member. Hence, it takes a church to raise a child. It's not just the job of parents and church leaders - it's the job of us all. We can all help to raise our children - to make the seed fall to the ground and bring forth other seed - abundant seed. But, just as with Jesus and his passion, we need to go through a death with him for new seed, new life to spring forth, for change to create life and new shoots appearing through the brown earth.

Love is costly, change is costly - but not necessarily financial - commitment is the cost. Change is always necessary for growth, or for a rekindling of spirit and all it needs is some commitment. Commit to being a family in relationship, a family that talks and values every member - of any age.

A family that gathers at meal times and shares in engaging with God. And as Fr David reminded us on Lent 2 - we are all children of God - whether you are 0 or 100 and we can all reflect on the quality and quantity of our love.

Amen.