

Lent Week 5 Year B - 2024

Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 50; Hebrews 5:7-9; Gospel 12:20-30

When you walk into Mount St Bernard Abby church your vision is drawn immediately upwards to the large wooden crucifix which is suspended from the ceiling by three lengths of chain. It is a sombre sight.

I was sitting before it a few days ago. when the question occurred to me. 'Could I carry that?' I looked at its size, assessed its height and the breadth of the beams. I think I could, but of course by carry I mean drag it. The fact that must be half the thickness of a cross such as Jesus carried helped me arrive at that conclusion. But then my mind asked: 'Could you carry his cross, Jesus's cross?' That is a different matter. I think that deserved a definitive 'No, of course not'. I continued my gaze, and I imagined, that as the figure of Jesus looked down on me from the crucifix suspended above the earth a single drop of blood fell from his wounds onto the altar beneath it. Slowly, a flower unfolded itself from the spot where the blood had fallen and it was beautiful

This is Passion Sunday. This Sunday has its distinctive purpose before we enter Jerusalem with Jesus on Palm Sunday. Passion Sunday starts us walking resolutely to where his passion and death await Him. This is the end of the beginning.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, at the wedding at Cana, when Jesus is asked by his mother to do something about the wine which is running out, Jesus says '*Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*'¹ In John chapter 7 Jesus is teaching in the temple and the some of the Jews want

to kill him but they won't arrest him '*Because, his time had not yet come.*' Later, he does not go up to the Temple of Booths because, as he says, '*I am not going up to this feast, My time has not fully come*'² Again in Chapter 8, just after his encounter with the Woman Caught in Adultery, Jesus is teaching in the treasury of the temple and some of the temple authorities want to arrest him, but don't have courage to because '*His hour had not yet come.*'³ Today this changes.

Jesus' disciples Philip and Andrew go to him and tell him that some Greek travellers want to see him. Jesus's reply is not a reply. It seems totally out of sequence. The effect I think is purposeful, because it jars on the reader. He says '*Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*' Why now? Perhaps the situation around him created by his teaching and healing and the temple authorities desiring his death has created an atmosphere so oppressive that something simply has to give way or explode. Maybe he knows he has done enough to prepare for what is coming. He awakens from his prayer with his Father in heaven with his path clearly laid before him: '*Now the hour has come.*' His doom is upon him and the final drama is about to unfold.

But he has some other items to finalise first. A few more things for his disciples to hear and bear witness to. And maybe for you and for me.

*'I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.'*⁴ In hindsight the sense of the metaphor is clear, Jesus is the grain of wheat who must fall to the ground and die, so the church may sprout up. But I think there is more for us, here and now.

¹ John 2:3-4

² John 7

³ John 8:20

⁴ John, 12: 25

Lent Week 5 Year B - 2024

The Canadian Psychologist Jordan Peterson states that one of the reasons we have ideas is so that our ideas can die rather than us. By which he means that through the process of thinking we can determine which are good ideas and which are bad ideas and choose what are good so that we do not make stupid mistakes. Let go of the bad ideas.

As a parallel, I would like to suggest that we are asked to let go of our bad ideas, which we call 'sin'. If we let them go voluntarily and they drop to the ground, they will die. And when sin dies much good will spring up and flourish. . But, and this is a paradox, it can also in some way transform what was sin into the good. Just as the evil of Jesus being murdered on the Cross was turned to our healing and salvation. Let me explain: if you have a great resentment, perhaps against someone who betrayed you, it could kill you. You could nurse your anger like a child at your breast, and make it strong and mighty, until it tells you what to do. Or you could allow your resentment, anger and bitterness fall to the ground and die like a great drop of blood, and let it give birth to understanding and forgiveness: a life that is by far more fulfilling and worth living. This turns out to be not just an Easter Day story, it is an Easter for today story.

Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. Shall we go with him?