**The Secret to Life – A Sermon On John 12:20-33**

Today I am going to tell you the secret to life. Well, that’s overstating it a little bit! It’s something you’ve seen and experienced over and over.

“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” (John 12:24).

So, there you have it. Now you know. That’s the secret to life.

It’s the pattern of loss and renewal that runs throughout our lives and our world. Even if you’ve never thought of this as the secret to life, you’ve lived and experienced it, sometimes by choice and other times by chance. Either way it’s there, and we can embrace it, or try to avoid thinking about it.

Look at the way this pattern is present in your life.

Have you ever had someone special in your life and committed your life to another? If so, you have to let parts of your old life go and something of your single life changed so that you could be with that other person.

It’s often quite nice going out for the day or travelling on your own, because you can eat what you like, go to where you want, and stop for breaks whenever you are tired. But if you do that there’s no companionship, no one to share the journey with. So, most of us, most of the time, choose to go with someone else, and most of us, most of the time, manage to concentrate on what the other person wants, as well as ourselves!

How about parenting? If you are a parent or care for someone else. you know that there are sacrifices of yourself and your life to be made in order for the new life of your child to emerge and grow or for the person you care fir to be made comfortable. We give up parts of ourselves for the other.

Parents are continually letting go of their child so they can grow up. Have you ever been the caretaker of another? If so, you could name the parts of your life that was put to rest so that another might live with dignity, compassion, and love.

What are the costs, the losses, you paid for an education or a career? You chose certain losses and let go of some things so that other things could arise. For every choice we make, every yes we say, there is at least one no and probably many.

This same pattern is in nature. You can see it in the changing of the seasons, falling leaves and new blooms, and the setting and rising of the sun.

Think about the scriptural stories of loss and renewal. Abram left his country and kindred so that he might be made a great nation, renamed Abraham, and be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Jacob lost his old identity and was wounded so that he could become a new man, Israel, with a new life. James and John left their father, boats, and nets to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of people. Jesus taught his disciples, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again” (Mark 9:31).

The secret is out. It’s everywhere. It is a pattern of loss and renewal, dying and rising, letting go and getting back, leaving and return. It’s at the core of our baptism and it’s what we declare every Sunday in the eucharist.

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

What in your life do you need to let go of today? What might you need to leave behind? What needs to die so that something new can arise? Do you need to give something up- and not just for lent? Something bigger? It may be something emotional, or something more concrete?

It may require, in order to give it up, some changes, or reparations. What in your life do you need to let go of today?

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that today’s gospel (John 12:20-33) is set in the context of the Passover feast. Remember what that’s about? The Passover is the celebration of the Israelites’ liberation from bondage in Egypt. It’s about freedom and new life. It’s about letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life.

And there is something about this pattern that is the lens through which we see Jesus. Some Greeks come to Philip and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” I don’t know why they want to see Jesus but I have a few guesses. Jesus turned water into wine. He cleansed the temple. He healed the son of the royal official. He healed the paralytic. He fed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He walked on water. He gave sight to the man born blind. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Me too. That’s the Jesus I want to see. Don’t you?

Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks and their request. Philip and Andrew tell Jesus. And Jesus says to them, “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.” That’s his response to those who want to see him; to the Greeks, to you, to me.

You see, dying is not just about our physical death. Yes, it is that but it’s also more than that. We die a thousand deaths throughout our lifetime. We’ve talked about choices but there are others we don’t choose. The loss of a loved one, a relationship, health, opportunities, a dream; all deaths we didn’t want or ask for.

Seeing Jesus isn’t a spectator sport. It is a way to be followed, a truth to be embodied, a life to be lived. When those things happen we don’t choose, strangely maybe we have more to let go of - fear, anger or resentment, regret and disappointment, guilt…

That’s where we see him. It’s the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for new life to arise.

You’ve probably had at least one time in your life that when you look back on it you say, “I never want to go through that again. But I wouldn’t trade that experience for anything.”

As difficult or painful as that experience was it bore much fruit. You were changed and your life was renewed. It was one of those times when you were the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. And it may well have been one of those times when you knew you had seen Jesus, when you knew that God was present and working in your life.

I’ve had those times too.

But, probably like you, I’ve also had other kinds of losses which I would trade. The greatest loss I’ve had was when my husband took his own life. God knows I’ve learned a lot about myself and life as a result of that, and, in the end, my life has been reshaped and reformed in some very good and positive ways because of it. But, of course, I would change the circumstances for my children to have their dad back.

So, I say none of this lightly today. We each need to navigate our own loses and the things we may need to lose.

Losses come, that we choose, that we don’t choose – but wouldn’t change, and that we don’t choose- but certainly would want to change.

Embracing our loses, however, with help from others, gives room for new life and new ways of being present to arise. Our letting go gives God something with which to work.

So, as we reflect back, but very much more move forward, what is the grain of wheat in your life today that needs to fall into the earth and die?

This secret, this pattern of loss and renewal, will be unveiled everyday throughout Holy Week. I think that’s why we hear this text today, a week before Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. It’s our preparation for Holy Week. And you know where Holy Week ends, right? At Easter, the empty tomb, the dawn of a new day, and the renewal of life. The single grain has become the Bread of bread life! Given to us in the Eucharist. No longer a single grain but grown into wheat, made into flour and risen.

But you also know that you don’t plant a seed and go back in ten minutes or the next day and see a new sprout. Growth can be slow, and the fruit of new life takes time, usually longer than we want it to. Yet, even when unseen, unbelieved, or unrecognized, the power and life of God are present and at work in the depths of our life, in the dark and hidden places. That’s the mystery of life.

“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.”

From all our losses, fruit will come and we will see the Risen Jesus.

We want to see Jesus.