

Note: The following message will be shared by Reverend Caleb Kim this Sunday, September 6, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. for the congregation of St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls, and our community on Zoom.

Title: A Kernel of Wheat

In South Korea, there is a historical cemetery called Yangwhagin. Approximately 140 foreign missionaries and their family members are buried in this sacred ground. These missionaries came to Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In those days, the Christian faith had no freedom to grow on the Korean Peninsula. Koreans were struggling through immense poverty, disease, and war. Some of these missionaries lost their own lives, as well as the lives of their spouses and children, to these hardships. They could have enjoyed comfortable lives and practiced their faith in peace in their homelands. Yet, they laid down those privileges and devoted their lives to spreading the Word of God in Korea. While visiting this cemetery, we can read the moving inscriptions carved into their headstones. One monument reads: "If I had a thousand lives to give, Korea should have them all." When we reflect on these heartfelt words, we are deeply moved. We are compelled to ask ourselves: What inspired these servants of God to love the souls in Korea so completely, until the Lord called them home?

As we anticipate the celebration of our fourth church anniversary and the ordination of our new elders next Sunday, we have been journeying through our sermon series "Genuine Discipleship." In our first message, Jesus highlighted the dynamic relationship between mountain-moving faith and persistent, active prayer. When we place our trust in God, persevere in prayer to Jesus Christ, and strive to do what is right through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our Triune Lord can and will move mountains out of our path. He will enable us to experience divine miracles today and in the days ahead.

This morning, in the second message of our series, Jesus teaches us about the transformative influence of a sacrificial life through the simple illustration of a kernel of wheat. As authentic disciples of Christ, let us learn what it truly means to follow Him and explore how we can produce abundant spiritual fruit on our journey of faith.

In our gospel passage from John 12, we find a large crowd following Jesus. After He raised Lazarus from the dead, many people rushed out to meet Him. As Jesus entered Jerusalem with His disciples, the crowds gathered to acclaim Him as their king. The disciples were thrilled by Jesus' growing popularity. Some of the Pharisees, however, were consumed with jealousy, saying to one another, "Look how the whole world has gone after him" (John 12:19).

Jesus never travelled two or three hundred miles away from His hometown. He never wrote a book, nor did He embark on public tours. However, His influence spread far beyond Palestine into the surrounding nations. Indeed, His life reshaped human history, dividing time itself between B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini, Latin for “in the year of our Lord”).

Among the crowds in Jerusalem were several Greeks. We do not know precisely where they came from, but we know they had come to worship God at the Temple and wanted to learn more about Jesus. They approached Philip, likely because his hometown, Bethsaida, had a strong connection with Greek culture, saying, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus” (John 12:21). Philip then consulted his fellow disciple, Andrews, and together they brought the request to Jesus. In that era, Greek culture deeply valued philosophy, wisdom, and intellectual pursuit. Hearing of Jesus’ miraculous power and fame, these travelers likely wanted to discover His secrets to living a great life.

How did Jesus respond? In verse 23, He declared, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” The word hour in this context does not refer to standard clock time, like our Sunday worship service at 10:00 A.M. In the original Greek, hour refers to an appointed season or a divine moment designated for a specific action to unfold. To help the Greeks, His disciples, and all of us today understand this truth, Jesus shared a universal principle from God’s creation: “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). Whenever Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you”, He is highlighting a crucial truth. We must listen with open hearts. Today’s sacred lesson from a kernel of wheat may sound simple, yet it contains one of the most fundamental principles in God’s creation.

When we consider what happens to a kernel of wheat planted in the earth, the physical process is remarkable. A single kernel of wheat is tiny—smaller than a peanut. To grow, it must first be buried two or three centimeters beneath the soil. There, underground, it appears to decompose and die. Yet, as the seed gives up its independent form, a green shoot of new life emerges. This is the key point: When the tiny seed dies to itself completely, it yields a rich harvest. Without this process, no fruit can ever be born. The seed cannot hold back 1 percent; it must surrender entirely. Its decay is not an end, but the beginning of a new creation.

Consider the extraordinary potential within one kernel of wheat. A single seed can produce 100 to 125 new kernels after a single growing season of 100 to 120 days. If those seeds were replanted through five consecutive harvest cycles, they would yield

between 10 billion and 12.5 billion kernels of wheat! A single seed, multiplied over time, could provide three daily meals for a community of one hundred people for nearly 70 years. What incredible power God has placed inside one tiny seed!

Through this illustration, Jesus was speaking of Himself. In the deep spiritual sense, Jesus is the kernel of wheat.

When Jesus shared this truth, He was walking toward the cross—to die, to be buried, and to be raised to new life. By falling into the earth and offering His life as a ransom, He has brought eternal life to countless souls (Mark 10:45). Jesus knew that through His death, resurrection would come, bringing ultimate glory to God the Father. His profound words signaled that the appointed hour had arrived. His death on the cross—though seemingly tragic to human eyes—was the designated path to eternal glory.

After revealing this principle of fruitfulness, Jesus explained what it means for us to live as kernels of wheat in our daily lives: "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). This paradoxical statement lies at the very heart of the Gospel. It is so essential that it appears in all four Gospels (Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 17:33, John 12:25). Naturally, we are inclined to love ourselves, protect our interests, and prioritize our comfort. What, then, does Jesus mean when He tells us to "hate" our lives? Is He calling us to self-loathing or physical asceticism? Absolutely not.

We are all created in the beautiful image of God, and our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. In this verse, the word used for "life" in the first two instances refers to the human ego, or self-centeredness, or our fallen, sinful nature. That is why we, as human beings, tend to seek our own selfish desires and pleasures. However, when Jesus speaks of "eternal life" at the end of the verse, He uses a word that means everlasting, divine life. Therefore, to "hate our life in this world" means rejecting our self-centered, sinful ways so that we may receive God's true life.

In Mark 8:34, Jesus clarifies this commandment: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." We, as human beings, tend to cling to our selfish lives if we do not make a conscious effort to resist them. Following our sinful desires is something we often do naturally. But to be authentic disciples, we must daily fight against our selfish desires, take up our God-given responsibilities, and walk in the steps of our Lord.

How can we live out this calling and bear lasting fruit? In our Epistle reading, Galatians 5:16-25, the Apostle Paul sets two paths before us: walking by the sinful nature versus

walking by the Spirit. When we give in to our fallen nature, we produce harmful fruits—sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, jealousy, outbursts of anger, and self-centeredness. We might hide these behaviours from those around us for a time, but nothing is hidden from God. On the other hand, when we surrender our hearts to the Lord and walk by the Spirit, our lives produce abundant spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Denying ourselves does not mean dwelling on our failures and shortcomings or living in self-condemnation. It means choosing to stop living solely for ourselves and starting to live for God's glory. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we examine our hearts through the mirror of God's Word, surrender our lives daily to Jesus Christ, and walk with Him. This is not a one-time decision; it is a lifelong walk of faith.

At this point, we might ask ourselves: Why does hating our sinful nature matter to us? People around us often seem free to do whatever they want. Why should we follow Jesus' path of self-denial? Jesus answers these questions in verse 26: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

First, we follow this path because our Lord commands it. Let us ask ourselves: Are we committed followers of Christ, or are we merely fans? There is a big difference. A fan observes from a distance for entertainment and inspiration, requiring little commitment. A follower, however, is deeply committed to the Master's cause, living daily with His teachings and sharing His love with the world.

Second, we need to consider where Jesus was and where He is now. Our Lord went to Gethsemane, carried His cross, and was laid in a tomb. But He was raised from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in glory.

This leads us to the next point: God honors those who serve His Son. Are we excited about what awaits us as we continue to follow our Lord Jesus? I believe that all of us—here in this sanctuary and joining us online—find great joy in our final destination and reward.

When we look at the troubles of our world, it is easy to become discouraged. However, as followers of Jesus, we need to look to His sacrificial example. Jesus did not lose His life by accident; He freely laid it down to give us eternal life. Even when His soul was troubled in the shadow of the cross, He did not pray to escape His calling. Instead, He prayed: "It was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!" (John 12:27-28). Jesus' primary passion was to honor the Father in every circumstance.

And how did God answer Him? A voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28). God exalted Jesus, giving Him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9). Think about this for a moment: On Good Friday, Jesus was broken, crucified, and buried like a seed in the ground. But on Easter Sunday, He was raised in power, bringing forth a glorious harvest of salvation for us all.

The great lesson for us today is Jesus' burning desire to make God His highest priority. Friends, this morning, let us reflect on our own calling. Are we willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus anew? When we surrender our lives to Christ, He fills us with peace and indescribable joy.

Jesus lived as a kernel of wheat for us. Though He was God Himself, He set aside His heavenly glory to serve us, dying so that we might receive forgiveness and eternal life. As we prepare to celebrate our church anniversary next Sunday, God calls us to recommit our lives to His kingdom. When we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, God not only promises us a heavenly reward, but He also produces abundant fruit through our lives here on earth.

As we approach our upcoming anniversary, it is fitting that we remember those faithful brothers and sisters who have gone before us—those who lived as kernels of wheat and are now with the Lord. Today, I want to recognize two late elders of our amalgamated congregation of Knox Glenarm and St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls. Please understand: while many dedicated servants have blessed our faith community, I would like to remember two whose lives especially reflected this faithful commitment...

Thinking of our shared meals brings to mind our Annual Stew Dinner and supported by so many of you. After each stew dinner, I received many compliments from various people not only for the delicious food, but also for our friendly and welcoming church environment and our spiritual presence in our town. You know my role that day: I simply served the stew alongside my partner. Yet so many people worked behind the scenes. Some chopped vegetables and cooked. Some prepared desserts and set tables. Some moved back and forth from the kitchen to the dining tables to serve our guests. Others washed dishes and cleaned the hall afterward. All these acts of service are living examples of what it means to be a kernel of wheat in a godly manner. Our church is deeply blessed by lay leaders who serve God with unity and grace.

As we continue to walk with God as the amalgamated congregation of Glenarm and Fenelon Falls, let us like spiritual kernels of wheat, follow the example of Jesus Christ.

May we love and glorify God with all our heart, mind, and strength, reflecting His truth and love through our words and our actions in this beautiful world. Amen!

**In this sermon, I have used thoughts and material from various sermons based on John 12:17-29 & Galatians 5:16-25.*