

**Worship Service for March 21<sup>st</sup>: 5th Sunday in Lent**

- **Old Testament:** Jeremiah 31:31-34
- **New Testament:** John 12:20-33
- **Psalms:** Psalm 119:9-16

**Announcements:**

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on March 31<sup>st</sup>. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 2.

**Sermon: Dying In Order To Grow In Christ!**

In the Old Testament the Israelites had a roller-coaster relationship with God. God had chosen this nation to walk with them and He introduced Himself to them and made a covenant with them. In this covenant, He promised to be with them, bless them and protect them and never leave them if only they will walk in His ways and obey His commandments. The Israelites kept breaking God's laws not because there was something wrong with those laws but because there was something wrong with their hearts.

The law revealed their sinful nature and their inability to stay faithful to God's commandments and to the covenant between them and God. And in our Old Testament passage today, God who is rich in mercy, decided to make a new covenant and relationship with them. One that was rich and dynamic whereby He would write His laws in the hearts of His people.

This new covenant introduces us to God's Son Jesus Christ in our New Testament passage. The One whom God has sent to seal the deal for the new covenant He promises, because of course that covenant comes with a price. It cannot happen until blood is shed, not the blood of animals but the blood of one who has never known sin. A price that will be paid once and for all and that we can tap into anytime we have the need. The kind of price that will permit us to come boldly, to come with confidence into God's throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This new covenant was going to be made between God and the Israelites and in order for the covenant to be extended to the Greeks/Gentiles, Jesus had to die.

Reasons why, when the Greeks come to see Jesus, instead of going to see them, Jesus declares that the time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw people unto me." Jesus' death and resurrection were the conditions to which the Greeks/Gentiles will be included in the new covenant. It was the reason why we were included in this covenant.

And Jesus told his disciples that in order for us to fully partake of this new covenant we have to do three things:

1. First, we have to hate our lives in this world in order to keep it for eternal life. We have to die in order to grow.
2. Secondly, we have to serve him and if we do, we will be honored by the Father.
3. Thirdly, we have to follow him, that where he is we will be there also.

And Jesus led by example. He obeyed the Father and served Him by glorifying the Father. His glorification involved his death, resurrection and ascension back to be united with the Father. And yes, it was not easy even for Jesus and we are told that his soul was troubled. Jesus knew the suffering that would be required for him to obey his God. He had to die for the sins of the world and endure that separation from his Father. His heart was heavy and troubled, and we are told in Scripture that he was so troubled that when he prayed, sweat drops fell from his blood that was as thick as blood. Yet this did not cause him to flee from his task. His mission was to suffer and die for sinners and he accomplished that. He served, followed God diligently and literally died to save the world.

What is our mission as Christians? Our mission is to hate our lives in the world – the Bible tells us that we are in the world, but we are not of the world. Hating our lives in the world means not being self-centered. It means dying to self and living for God to fulfil His plans and purposes for our lives.

Serving God is not always going to be easy as we have seen in the case of Jesus. Not everyone is going to be crucified on the cross, yet we all have our part to play in bringing God's kingdom to come to pass. Are we going to flee because of the challenges and difficulties we face?

Dying to self means we cannot stop serving God because someone stepped on our toes; because someone did or said something that we didn't like or because they made fun of us while we were serving God or because we didn't have our way.

Challenges will come; we will not be appreciated for every good thing that we are doing or have done. Sometimes we might never even be appreciated. Let that not stop us.

Dying to self also means letting go of our old self. In our baptism we are taught that we die with Christ and are resurrected with him. After that resurrection, we no longer live, but Christ now lives in us. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away and all things have become new." Therefore, our old self of anger, judgment, criticism, worldliness is dead, and we now live a holy and righteous life in Christ. We are dead to sin and alive to Christ and pleasing God, pleasing our Lord Jesus Christ now matters to us more than anything else.

Dying to self means we grow we are transformed, and we no longer portray our old self. We now portray our life in Christ to the extent that the people around us notice the transformation; to the point that they desire to become like us; to the point where they too desire to encounter our Lord Jesus Christ who has brought us such great transformation.

Jesus is calling on us to choose today whether we want to be followers or spectators. When we are watching a game, maybe of hockey or football and we are spectators, we will be sitting comfortably in our chairs and reacting to the game. The player is the one who is fully involved in making sure that the team succeeds in their game. Some of them are at the forefront playing on the field while others are behind the scenes working to make sure that the players deliver.

They make sacrifices – sacrificing worldly pleasures to stay fit in order to win their game. They are fully invested in everything that is going on.

The spectators on the other hand, show up when the game is about to be played and will either get offended at the players or get excited if they are winning. Everything they do is for themselves and not for others.

Hating our life in this world is refusing to be self-centered and choosing to be a servant of others. It's choosing to contribute to the success of the kingdom either with a team or singlehandedly where the need arises. Hating the world is dying to self and living for God. It is carrying one's cross and following Jesus. Amen.

## **Prayers**

Steadfast God, in the midst of unending change and challenge, we give you thanks for your presence to sustain us. While we find it hard to understand why things happen, we are grateful that you are with us. You understand our fears; you support and guide us; and you give us courage to face the unknown. We give thanks that you intend goodness for us; that your gift of faith is a solid rock which supports us; and that prayer gives us the hope you keep working in ways seen and unseen for goodness to prevail.

God of innumerable mercies, give us the grace to be daily buried in the love of Christ, like the seed that is buried in the earth, and thereby may we begin to live more abundantly. With his help, may we learn of that fruitful life which spent in loving others can glorify your name throughout the world. Then may the earth know its Saviour, who with you in the unity of the Spirit are loved and worshipped, world without end.

Loving God, in this time of uncertainty when there is much to be anxious about, we pray for the world you love. Send your healing Spirit to guide countries and communities as they respond to COVID-19. Bless the work of medical researchers and frontline health care workers in these stressful times. Bless the plans to offer vaccine to all who want it and give us patience and common sense as we wait our turns for vaccination. Send your healing Spirit to bring peace with justice to the troubled places.

Bring care and comfort to those who have been hurt in conflict, wisdom to those who offer leadership in their communities, and courage to those who advocate for the most vulnerable.

Send your healing Spirit to mend relationships between religious groups and cultural groups who find themselves in tension or turmoil. We pray for mutual respect to grow between peoples who look at each other with suspicion and among people who have experienced painful histories with each other. Open our hearts and minds to those whose situations and concerns we don't understand and bring your gift of reconciliation to us all.

Send your healing Spirit to people we know and the earth you love. We remember before you friends in grief, relationships marked by tension, those facing difficulty

at work or finding work, disagreements in our church or community, concerns about the environment we depend on.

We pray for the continuing ministry of the church in our neighbourhoods and around the world. As we prepare to celebrate Easter and Christ's resurrection, help us plan safely and creatively. Send your healing Spirit to raise our hearts and our hopes with the promise of new life in Christ. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us all a willing spirit.

God of growth and new life, with our gifts we offer you our thanks and praise for the promise of spring and the promise of resurrection in Christ Jesus. Bless our gifts and through them, accomplish more than we can ask or imagine, as they bear fruit in the world you love, through Christ, our Lord. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.