**Weekend of Sunday, March 17, 2024**

**5th Sunday in Lent/Lectionary X/Year B**

**First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**Second Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10**

**Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33**

**Sermon Title: *“The Way of Sacrificial Love”***

**Theme**

*God promises Jeremiah that a “new covenant” will be made in the future: a covenant that will allow all the people to know God by heart. The church sees this promise fulfilled in Christ, who draws all people to himself when he is lifted up on the cross. Our baptismal covenant draws us to God’s heart through Christ and draws God’s love and truth into our hearts. We join together in worship, sharing in word, song, and meal, and leave strengthened to share God’s love with all the world.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts.*

31The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Second Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10**

*Using priestly imagery and references to the Old Testament, the author explains how Christ lived in trusting obedience to God, and so God has made Christ the source of our eternal salvation.*

5Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,
 “You are my Son,
  today I have begotten you”;
6as he says also in another place,
 “You are a priest forever,
  according to the order of Melchizedek.”
 7In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Gospel: John 12:20-33**

*Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus’ words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.*

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, 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. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

 27“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” 29The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

**Sermon**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as I mentioned in the announcements, we are observing the 5th week in Lent, sort of more than halfway through our Lenten fast and closing in on the celebration of Easter. We have been journeying with Jesus towards the cross, and at least during the four weeks of Lent that I have been your guide, we have been embracing the profound mystery of our baptism into Christ Jesus.

Today, our hearts are drawn to the Gospel of John, chapter twelve. For added context know that John twelve is a pivotal chapter in John’s Gospel. Jesus has already traveled to Jerusalem and had the Palm Sunday experience. It is unclear, but this reading might have happened later that same day, and Jesus has once again retreated to Bethany, to the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha where he will retreat every evening until Holy Thursday, the infamous night of his betrayal.

For the rest of the week, Jesus’s tone speaks of his impending death but also the transformative power of sacrificial love. Within these verses lies a timeless message of hope, redemption, and the call to discipleship, inviting us to embrace the way of the cross and to live as faithful witnesses to the love of Christ.

In the Gospel Reading, we encounter a group of Greeks who come to Philip with a request: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." This simple yet profound desire encapsulates the universal longing to encounter the living God, to find meaning and purpose in life, and to experience the transformative power of divine love. I know I can relate. It is my greatest desire. I hope you feel the same way.

The Greeks' request serves as a foreshadowing of Jesus' impending death and resurrection, which will open the way for people of all nations to come to know and worship him. It also underscores the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry, which extends beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, culture, and social status to embrace all who seek him with sincerity and faith.

But notice that Jesus doesn’t really answer the request in a way we expect. Rather than respond to the Greeks' request, Jesus speaks of his impending death:

23"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Jesus uses the metaphor of a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying to bear much fruit, symbolizing his own sacrificial death and the abundant life that will spring forth from it.

This imagery of death and resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith, encapsulating the paradoxical nature of the Gospel. It is through Jesus' death on the cross that the power of sin and death is defeated, and the promise of new life and redemption is made available to all who believe in him.

Jesus speaks candidly of his anguish and distress as he faces the prospect of his impending death:

27Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

Jesus acknowledges the human struggle and suffering that accompanies the way of the cross, yet he submits himself willingly to the Father's will out of love for humanity and his obedience to the Father’s will.

Jesus goes on to declare,

32 "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

This statement not only foreshadows Jesus' crucifixion but also reveals the universal scope of his redemptive work. Through his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus will draw people of all nations and backgrounds into relationship with himself, offering the gift of salvation and eternal life to all who believe in him.

Central to our understanding of baptism is the recognition of its transformative power in uniting us with Christ in his death and resurrection. In Galatians 3, the apostle Paul writes:

26for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Our baptism into Christ Jesus signifies not only our identification with his death and resurrection but also our participation in the ongoing work of redemption and reconciliation. Through the waters of baptism, we are cleansed from sin, born anew by the Spirit, and incorporated into the body of Christ. Though nothing God creates is separated from Him, baptism marks the beginning of our journey of faith, as we are called to continually die to sin and rise to newness of life in Christ.

As we reflect on the themes of sacrificial love, redemption, and discipleship presented in the Gospel of John, let us consider how we can embrace the way of the cross during this Lenten season:

Surrender: Just as Jesus surrendered himself willingly to the Father's will, let us submit ourselves to God's purposes with humility and obedience. May we relinquish our own desires and ambitions, trusting in God's wisdom and sovereignty even when the path ahead seems difficult or uncertain. I know surrender is not a virtue we embrace in America, but God’s claim on us transcends any national allegiance.

Love: Like Jesus, let us embody sacrificial love in our relationships and interactions with others. May we follow his example of selflessness and service, seeking the well-being and thriving of those around us, even at great personal cost.

Witness: As baptized disciples of Christ, let us bear witness to the transformative power of the Gospel in our words and deeds. May we proclaim the good news of salvation and eternal life to all who would hear, inviting others to experience the love, grace, and mercy that we have found in Jesus Christ.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. Our Lenten journey is rapidly coming to an end. It will intensify to the point of despair, and yet we know how the story turns out. May we be inspired to embrace the way of sacrificial love, following in the footsteps of our Savior who gave his life for the salvation of the world. Let us remember that in Christ's death and resurrection, we find the promise of new life and redemption. May we respond to this gift with faith, gratitude, and wholehearted devotion, knowing that through baptism, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and empowered to live as children of God.

**Prayer**

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gifts of baptism that we may:

* provide for those who are poor,
* pray for those in need,
* fast from self-indulgence,

and above all, that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen