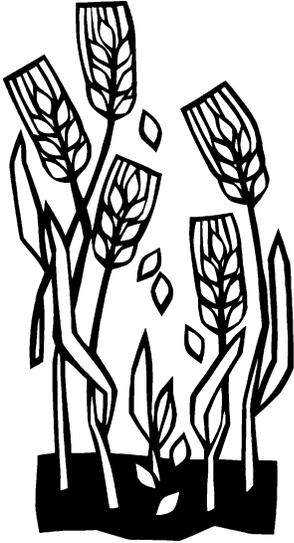


**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**March 21, 2021**



### **Introduction**

*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 and song, and leave strengthened to share God’s love with all the world.*

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, Father, ✚ Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Fountain of living water, **pour out your mercy over us.**  
**Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.**  
**Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.**  
**Wash us in your cleansing flood.**  
**Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus,**  
**as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.**

Beloved, God’s word never fails.  
The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ,  
the wisdom and power of God, your sins are ✚ forgiven,  
and God remembers them no more.  
Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

**Gathering Hymn ELW # 335**

***Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## Prayer of the Day

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## 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.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

## Psalmody: Psalm 51:1-12

- <sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
- <sup>2</sup>**Wash me through and through from my wickedness,  
and cleanse me from my sin.**
- <sup>3</sup>For I know my offenses, and my sin is ever before me.
- <sup>4</sup>**Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.**
- <sup>5</sup>Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness, a sinner from my mother's womb.
- <sup>6</sup>**Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,  
and would have me know wisdom deep within.**
- <sup>7</sup>Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.
- <sup>8</sup>**Let me hear joy and gladness;  
that the body you have broken may rejoice.**
- <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my wickedness.
- <sup>10</sup>**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**
- <sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup>**Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.**

## **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.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

### **Reflection on the Text**

Here we read and hear that Jesus foretells of his death again. It seems like a repeating theme, doesn't it? Makes us wonder why that seems to happen.

If you go through the Gospel of John, you will notice that the location and most of the people around him are not always the same. The disciples are normally around but there are others nearby as well. Jesus is teaching the newcomers. Jesus is also filling in the blanks for the Apostles. It is like teaching math, or anything else, that has a process. Some basic information is repeated while something new is learned so that a better understanding is grasped. Jesus and John use examples that most people would understand.

That is why I appreciate the example of a grain of wheat that is used. Most, if not all of us here, have farmed, grown a garden, or planted flowers and trees. An acorn "dies" off and falls of the limb. Yet, from the acorn comes the mighty oak.

For those who have ever worked on a crop farm or planted a garden, think about corn. You will get corn seed from a hardware store somewhere but the seed itself comes from the cob. The corn seed grows into a beautiful, green stalk and leaves. In time, a cob grows. What happens next? The stalk dies and everything dries out. Then the cob is harvested. Some of that seed is used to bring new life next year. Out of death, comes life. A lot of life.

Jesus is describing how new life comes through Jesus' death and resurrection. As we will hear in more detail over the next few weeks, Jesus will go into the earth but he does not stay there.

Now, John does mention here that Jesus speaks about the possibility of backing out of dying on the cross. We can understand if Jesus does not want to go through with it. The process sounds painful. Yet, in obedience and love for God, Jesus will go forward with his mission of reconciling the world and God. As we heard last week, Jesus came to save the world, not condemn it.

Some may ask who is intended for this new life that Jesus provides? Anyone who believes in Jesus. It can be Greeks that come from outside Judea or Israel. It can be someone from the United States, Europe, Asia, or anyone from anywhere else. This is available to all.

For those who have faith in Jesus, there is abundant grace and forgiveness. Yet we must follow where Christ goes. That may include changes in our lives. Because God loves us, in response we will try to live into what Jesus is leading us.

This does not mean hating life here on earth. It is more rejecting the world's ideas of self-centeredness. We should love God and our neighbors, just like Jesus gives as an example. Not that we are simply copying Jesus to earn our salvation. We are given the gift of overwhelming love from God, that includes Jesus dying on the cross for us. That will change us. It is a case of stopping fighting and listening to the Holy Spirit which helps us grow in faith. Almost without our knowing it, we will reflect God to the world.

Some may think this sounds simple and a lot like good works. When God is the one doing the work through us, it is God's good works. Not ours. God has and will glorify his name, just like it says in verse 28.

Jesus tells us in verse 30 that, after his resurrection, all will be drawn to him. It is a promise we can rely on. Jesus, just like God the Father and the Holy Spirit, keeps all the promises that have been made. These promises of love, forgiveness, and faithfulness have been given to us. Jesus invites us on this journey of life. Life that is here now, and the promised life later.

In thinking about all of this, remember this from today's psalm (Ps 51:10-12):

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

Amen

**Hymn of the Day ELW # 759 /LBW # 479**

***My Faith Looks Up to Thee***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## **Apostles' Creed**

*We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.\*  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

You wash us through and through and remember our sin no more. Make your church a community of forgiveness throughout the world. Give your people courage to forgive; through them show the world new possibilities. Bless ministries of repentance and reconciliation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You fill the earth—from tiny grains of wheat to the mighty thunder—with your presence, and you call us to attend to your will for all creation. Grant weather that prepares the soil for seeds; protect all from violent storms, flooding, and wildfires. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You promise to write your law on our hearts. Guide citizens throughout the world to shape communities that reflect your mercy, justice, and peace, and give them creativity to work for the welfare of all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You sustain us with your bountiful Spirit. Restore the joy of all who need to know your presence: those who are lonely or feel unforgivable, those who need healing of mind or body, those who are dying, and all who grieve. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Jesus calls us to follow him in life and death. Empower this congregation in discipleship. Equip children and teachers in Sunday school, confirmation, and learning ministries. Give us your truth and wisdom and teach us to follow Jesus. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

In the cross of Christ, your name is glorified. We praise you for those who have given us words to worship you. With all those who have died in Christ, bring us into life everlasting. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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 trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn ELW # 338/LBW # 107**

***Beneath the Cross of Jesus***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.