

## Sunday Update

### John 12:20-33

*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.'* 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. 23 Jesus replied, *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. 27 'Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!'* Then a voice came from heaven, *'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'* 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. 30 Jesus said, *'This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'* 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Spring is the season for sowing seeds. The biggest challenge behind that idea this year might be getting seeds in the first place! We're told that garden centres will open at the beginning of April, but there will be big queues of people all trying to do the same thing – buy seeds and plants for their gardens in the spring. I've managed to find seeds online, but it became complicated: one seed company sold some of the seeds I wanted, but not all of them; other seeds were out of stock when I went looking; some seeds that I've bought before are just not available anywhere. We sow seeds in boxes, or in pots, or straight into the ground, then we stand back and wait for them to germinate. That germination part of the process is out of our hands: we can create the situation for seeds, but we can't make them grow. The whole process of germination means that the seed itself dies so that the plant may grow; once the plant has started to grow, if you go looking for the seed, you usually won't find it. The seed has died so that the new life of a plant can grow and produce flowers and fruit.

Jesus uses that picture to talk about Himself. He's having a conversation with someone, though we're not quite sure who! The conversation comes after some "Greeks", in Jerusalem for the Passover, had come to Jesus' disciples with a very simple request: *"Sir, we would like to see Jesus."* They ask Philip, who goes to Andrew and together then tell Jesus. We're not sure what happens next. Was their request granted? We'd like to think so, but we're not explicitly told. Was the conversation about seeds a conversation with these Greeks? There is a hint later in verse 34 about "the crowd" responding to what Jesus says, so maybe Jesus is talking to the crowd in the city after He has ridden into the city on Palm Sunday.

*"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* (verse 24) There's the gardening principle. The picture is clear and well-known; it is what happens when you plant seeds of any kind, either as a gardener or a farmer. Jesus takes that principle and applies it to Himself and to His disciples. There is something here about Jesus and what He came to do and there is something here about the way in which we are to live our lives when we follow Jesus. This is not easy for us to grasp, but it is so important, both for our faith in Jesus, understanding why He came, and for the way in which we live our lives, so that we can be the right kind of people.

Let's look at what Jesus says about Himself first. The conversation begins with Jesus asserting: *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified"* (verse 23) This is the most common way by which Jesus talks about Himself, the Son of Man. He has said over and over again that the time was not yet right for Him to act, but here and now the time has come and the climax of His ministry is about to unfold. Then later, He says *"but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* (verse 32) When He talks about being "lifted up" there is something of a double meaning here: first of all, He will be physically "lifted up" on a cross; that was the way in which crucifixion worked, being lifted up on the cross and dying of suffocation. But there is another meaning alongside that: after the cross will come the resurrection and Jesus being "lifted up" to heaven in glory, "ascended", and honoured by God for His service, raised up to His rightful place one more as King and Lord over everything. Jesus will die, and after His death will come the new life of resurrection; after His death will come the new life of salvation for us.

The same gardening principle applies to us and our lives. *"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"* (verse 25) This is all about what matters most to us. Is the most important thing to us our ego, getting our own way, and doing things in the way we want? Is that ego the centre and driving force of our lives? Jesus teaches a different way. The follower of Jesus learns to put that sense of "ego" to death and in its place to grow a love for God and for other people. The life that puts "ego" to death allows lots of other good things to grow in its place: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (see *Galatians 5:22*) As well as producing all kinds of fruit, these good life-qualities, Jesus promises that God will honour that kind of service. "Ego" has died, but there is a new kind of life blossoming in its place.

This is not easy! This is the challenge of a lifetime for everybody. That was certainly true for Jesus. We get a sense of that in the inner wrangling that is going on in Jesus's heart and mind. *'Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"?...'* (verse 27) Jesus is in turmoil. The cross is looming; can He walk away from it? Can He escape the agony and pain of the cross? But He also sees that this is His very reason for being here; He came to go to the cross. The cross is the centre of His mission to save the world. That may seem strange to us, and we might advise Jesus to take a different tack, but the cross is the heart of God's mission to save the world. So Jesus dies, the seed going into the ground so that new life can blossom. He dies so that we might find salvation.

The cross is the centre of Christian faith. It is the centre of God's plan to save the world; it is the centre of Jesus' mission; it is the centre of our faith, believing in a crucified Saviour; it shapes our life, understanding that "ego" has to die to allow a new life to blossom. Take time today to reflect on the cross and to re-affirm the cross at the centre of our faith.

*Prayer: Father, thank You that when seeds die they produce new life; thank You that Jesus came to go to the cross, that it was the very reason for His being here; and that when He was "lifted up" in the two senses of that phrase, He drew people to Him in faith. Father, draw us afresh to Jesus and Him crucified, to believe in and trust a the Saviour who died for us. Help us to live our lives in Jesus' ways, putting our self-centred ways to death and living with love for Jesus in our hearts.*

*Day by day, dear Lord of you  
Three things I pray:  
To see you more clearly,  
To love you more dearly,*

*To follow you more nearly,  
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people who are wrestling with what is important in their lives; will they always and only want their own way all of the time? Inspire them to be able to put “ego” to death, to love Jesus and to love other people.
- For our city this week, where we hear stories of violence against buses and bus drivers; where we hear stories of racism; where there are other matters that bother us. Lord, help us to hear again the values that Jesus teaches and the ways of His kingdom.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For people who are isolated again by lockdown, spending time on their own again and feeling lonely; for people in care homes, again cut off from family and friends, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils at home and some in schools; for families trying to manage their children and helping them to take part in learning however it is delivered; for teachers working in new ways and finding that very demanding.
- For businesses that are shut: the pubs and hotels, hairdressers, and others; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are again on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, with buildings again closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

Give thanks to the Lord	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGTZq3uCPm0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGTZq3uCPm0</a>
Our God is a great big God	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaXPXWBCe3I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaXPXWBCe3I</a>
Man of sorrows, what a name	<a href="#">Man of Sorrows (What a Name) - YouTube</a>
Holy Spirit, hear us	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lh1rWM9YWM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lh1rWM9YWM</a>
Fight the good fight	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVu7epY8WNE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVu7epY8WNE</a>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at [prayerjgpc@gmail.com](mailto:prayerjgpc@gmail.com)

#### **Some other resources:**

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – [www.jgpc.org.uk](http://www.jgpc.org.uk)
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)

- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

**DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS** - New issues of **"Word For Today"** and **"Word For You Today"** Booklets for February, March and April are now available. Please contact Michael Merriman who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Ian Aitken. **Let the Bible feed you.**

**Messy Easter Family Activity Bags** – we are putting together an activity bag for families to make use of over Easter; this is the third version, with Easter and Christmas. They have been really well-used and a great hit with many. If you would like some for your family, children of grand-children then contact Jim on [messychurchjvp@gmail.com](mailto:messychurchjvp@gmail.com) with a note of how many bags you would like and the address to which they are to be delivered.



# All people

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

## Prepare yourself...

*Invite everyone to suggest words to describe God. Record these on a large sheet of paper.*

We praise you, God, that you are (insert words).

**Amen.**



## Challenge...

You have 60 seconds to gather as many things in your hands as you can safely carry. Once your hands are full try waving, shaking hands or hugging someone.

Is it possible to do?

## Question...



Has there ever been a time when you have felt left out?

How did that make you feel?



## Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in John 12:20-33. You can read them in a Bible or find them [here](#).

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



## Talk together...

Phillip and Andrew have seen the way Jesus welcomes everyone, leaving no-one out. So when some Greeks (who would be considered “outsiders”) came to meet Jesus they knew Jesus would welcome them too.

- Why do you think Jesus was so alluring to people? Why did so many people want to be in his presence?
- Have you given anything up for Lent? Is it easy or difficult to give up something that is normally part of your life?
- Where do you feel most welcome and why?
- How might you make others feel more welcome? Is there one thing you could do to make someone feel loved and welcomed?
- Jesus talks about his death that is to come. This might seem strange, but Jesus is pointing out God’s enduring love for humankind. It is available to all and no-one is excluded. And the way it’s been made possible was through Jesus dying on the cross and rising again. How can we love like Jesus loved? What might we need to give up in order to welcome others?

## Play together...

**Musical chairs (or statues or bumps!):** Continue the game until one person is left.

Talk about how it felt to be “out”.

Can you think of people who might be on the outside generally? Is there any way we could help them feel more included?

## Make something...

You will need: a selection of pipe cleaners.  
Make lots of people in different colours, shapes and sizes.

Once you’ve made as many as you want join the figures into a circle by twisting the hand of one figure onto the next. You should end up with a free-standing ring of people symbolising diversity. If you don’t have pipe cleaners, you could use playdoh or make paper people.



## Pray together...

Curl up into a ball on the floor and imagine you are seeds. Slowly mime growing by opening out your fingers, then arms, then slowly standing up until you are stretched as wide as they can be.

Dear God,  
just as a grain of wheat needs to let go of its seed to grow into a great big plant,  
help us to let go of the things that hold us back from loving you.

**Amen.**

## Praise together...

Shine from the inside out

Everybody's welcome

