

## *Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent*

*By Revd Christina Mason*

Week by week we have been coming nearer to that most solemn period of the Christian year when we remember that Jesus was crucified; a time of terror, pain and profound loss for all who were witnesses on that awful day. Today marks the start of Passiontide; the time when we begin the last stages of our journey, with Jesus, towards the foot of the cross. Perhaps now, more than at any other time we see Jesus as the “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”.

Jesus sees the danger lying ahead but continues his work of teaching and healing. He doesn't look for suffering, but he faces it in the full knowledge of what it will involve. He knows he will suffer in his body the agony of crucifixion; he knows he will suffer in his mind all the misery, hurt and humiliation people can inflict on him and each other; he knows what it is like to be laughed at, to be scorned and rejected. When Jesus commits himself to the road that leads to the cross, he commits himself to identifying fully with the pain and suffering of this world. “It is for this reason I've come to this hour. Father, glorify your name”.

In our gospel reading from St John Chapter 12, we hear the response from Jesus when he was approached by Philip and Andrew about a request from some Greeks who wanted to meet him, having no doubt heard so much of his teaching and his miracles of healing. Jesus, in response to their request says: ‘Very 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.’

I am sure that people hearing these words were as puzzled as perhaps even today we might be. Jesus, then and now, calls us to be grains of wheat that fall to the ground and die. Because, like seeds, it is in the dying that we have the potential to bear fruit. But what does this dying mean. I think Jesus is saying that we should be dying to those aspects of the present world that have been despoiled by human arrogance, with a failure to take care of the world and to live healthily in community as God has longed for. I believe Jesus was asking that his followers “die to”, or turn away from, let go of those aspects of the world which have been corrupted by systems of greed and violence and hatred. Then as now, there is much in the world that seduces us all to stay put and not change. In turning away from such seduction and saying NO we are likely, as Jesus was, to suffer, to sometimes experience hardship, and often to be mocked about being “different”.

Despite the brokenness of our world, there is hope that our churches and communities can be re-imagined through the lens of God's generous love. As the life and witness of Jesus shows, God's love has the power to heal, to resurrect and to enable human flourishing. Jesus' relationships underscored unconditional love and acceptance with those on the margins. The gospel message is that God is found in humility and vulnerability and not in the lust for power and arrogance.

We can cling on to our old lives, afraid of what might happen if we say yes to God's invitation to new life. Or, we can let old habits and ways of living go, as we think about renewing our acceptance and commitment as loyal disciples of Jesus. In so doing, the Kingdom of God becomes possible on this earth as in heaven. Amen