

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. It's also what is known as Passion Sunday.

- The start of Passiontide. We are now in the final two weeks of Lent.

This suggests our Lenten journey is picking up the pace.

Things are starting to get serious, the tension is growing in the gospel story.

[Lenten goals... Do we do them? If so, how are we doing?

Maybe we're frustrated at the progress or the lack of results...

- Like our new year resolutions, perhaps some of us have tripped up at times.
  - We are after all, often weak and fickle creatures]

Which leads us to today's first reading.

In this reading

- We see God again speaking about making a covenant
  - God is a God of Covenants
    - Lent Week 1 – Covenant with Noah
    - Lent Week 2 – Covenant with Abram

Covenants were where two parties commit to something particular

- Point to know is that God was always faithful to the covenants
  - It's us humanity that has always been unfaithful

And yet here in today's passage from Jeremiah – we see God once again making a covenant with the people.

- But this time it's different... it'll be written on their hearts...

*“No longer shall they say to one another “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.”*

*“For they shall all know me”*

Jeremiah himself didn't know how it would all play out.

- How things new covenant written on the hearts of the people would come about
  - what it would look like...

But the letter to the Hebrews and John tell us.

This is the point of the Biblical story.

- This is the point for the coming of God in the person of Jesus.

At the start of today's gospel reading we find some Greeks coming to some of Jesus' followers saying "We wish to see Jesus".

- We want to know him.

But as with most things in the gospels, the answer to this isn't straightforward.

We get Jesus going into another speech.

- This will be the last public speech before his crucifixion in John's gospel.
- All remaining speeches after this will be to his disciples.

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

If the Greeks – the Gentiles – thought they knew what it was they were looking for... they were wrong.

And so then Jesus tells a short parable... grain... wheat... dying... much fruit...

And then a challenge:

*"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also..."*

Eugene Peterson puts it like this:

*"In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal... If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice..."*

This language of death before life would have sounded confusing... terrifying.

- Perhaps it sounds terrifying to some of us.

We think we can find glory by protecting our life... by achieving power... control... influence.

But this is not the way of God.

- This is not the way God has set creation up to be.

Ezra Klein podcast – US governor – toxic working environment – the awful way he treated women in his office.

- Pondered other leaders of industry known for their harsh working environments
- Klein wonders: *"Have we been convinced that certain kinds of cruelty are just the cost of great leadership?"*

That is the way the world thinks things are to be run.

- It's the default way – the order of things.

And yet... *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..."*

The glorification of our God is seen in God coming to us in the person of Jesus.

- Coming to us and serving... Coming to us and dying for us... Being lifted up.
  - On the cross... this is glory.
    - This is the way of God's kingdom.

It wasn't easy for Jesus.

- Today's reading in the Book of Hebrews makes that clear, *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears..."*

That's understandable right?

- Jesus would have wanted to stay with his disciples.
  - To stay with his family.
    - Would have wanted to enjoy his life here just a bit more.

*"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."*

Life is found through death.

- Through giving of ourselves for others we meet God.

We are here because others took up this call.

- If the early Church missionaries has chosen to stay with their families, stayed where they were back in England some 200 years ago...
  - Would we be here today?
  - The history of the church is full of these examples.
    - Grain... wheat... dying... much fruit.

So Q before us – what are we to do?

Covenants were between two parties.

- And yet what happens when one of the parties keeps not coming through?
  - Keeps failing in its obligations?

Last week's Gospel reading tells us about things from God's perspective.

- *"For God so loved the world..."*
- God's covenant fulfilling is one that comes out of divine love

God's solution is to fulfill both sides of the covenant.

- In the incarnation... in Jesus we see God becoming human to live out what we have failed to do.

God has always been a faithful God.

As Jane Williams writes, *“The cost of God keeping his promises for us, despite our inability to keep our side of it, is written on the human heart, the human life and death of Jesus. The way God does what we cannot and will not do is to come himself as one of us, and keep both sides of the promise himself.”*

*“So when, in Jeremiah, God promises his people that they shall know him intimately, this is what he means... we will recognize him because he is one of us...”*

And yet *“Jesus is not our example – we are no more capable of copying him than Jeremiah’s people were of keeping the covenant. In Jesus, God does both sides of the covenant – he makes the promise and faithfully keeps it on our behalf.”*

This is the glory of God.

So we come back to the question, “What are we to do?”

Like those Gentiles at the start of today’s gospel reading, we come wanting to see Jesus.

- Wanting to know Jesus.
  - But perhaps now with a slightly new perspective.

If we’re still at a loss, then perhaps the starting point can be found in the Psalm set aside for today in the lectionary.

- A Psalm that has echoes of the reading in Jeremiah.
  - [Ps 51 – Ash Wednesday]

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”*

May this be our prayer during these final two weeks of Lent.

- That through this prayer we may live.
  - We may see God move in our hearts.
    - Be drawn closer to God as we make our journey towards Easter.