

INTROIT: TiS 768 Praise God, from whom all blessings flow

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ, who bears fruit in our lives is calling to us.

Will we listen?

Lord Jesus Christ, we open our lives to you.

The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to lose our lives that we might be found in Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ, we open our lives to you.

Come, let us worship the one who calls.

We come to worship God!

OPENING PRAYER

Indeed, O Christ, we open our lives to you.

Make us aware of your presence as we enter into this time of worship.

Open our minds and hearts that we might grow in understanding and be renewed in faith. Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

"We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging."

WELCOME

HYMN TiS 477 Jesus calls us here to meet him

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

Thanks and praise, glory and honour,
are rightfully yours, O God.

In the fullness of time,

you have written the law of your love on our hearts.

You have formed us for community
and transformed us into the likeness of Christ.

With each breath, we breathe in your Spirit
and are made one with you.

For the gift of life itself, and for your indwelling in our hearts,
we give thanks.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Psalm 51:1-12 (read responsively as a prayer of confession)

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

and cleanse me from my sin.

³ *For I know my transgressions,*

and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,

and done what is evil in your sight,

so that you are justified in your sentence

and blameless when you pass judgment.

- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ *You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ **Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.**
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Now hear these words of assurance:
Our God is merciful and kind, abounding in steadfast love.
God does not cast us away, but restores us to joy.
We belong to God. Amen.

AN EARLY WORD

HYMN TiS 609 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

BIBLE READINGS: Jeremiah 31:31-34
John 12:20-33

REFLECTION

It's no coincidence that today's gospel is set in the context of the Passover festival. The Passover is the celebration of the Israelites' liberation from bondage in Egypt. It's about freedom and new life. It's about letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life. And it's this movement into new life that forms the basis of Jesus' response to a group of people who approach his followers.

Some Greeks come to Philip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." While we don't know why they want to see Jesus we can make some guesses. Jesus had turned water into wine. He had cleansed the temple and healed the son of the royal official. He had fed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, and walked on water. He had given sight to the man born blind. He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Is it any wonder they are asking "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks and their request. Philip and Andrew tell Jesus. And Jesus says to them, "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." That's Jesus' response to those who want to see him - the Greeks, and you, and me.

What do we make of this reference to dying? Yes - it can mean a physical death, but it means so much more than that. A grain dies in order to bear much fruit. Here we have a pattern of loss - then renewal - a pattern that runs throughout our lives and our world.

We see this pattern in nature - in the changing of the seasons, falling leaves and new blooms, and the setting and rising of the sun.

We see this pattern of loss and renewal throughout scripture. Abram left his country and kindred so that he might be made a great nation, renamed Abraham, and be a blessing to all the families of the

earth. Jacob lost his old identity and was wounded so that he could become a new man, Israel, with a new life. Jeremiah foreshadowed that the old covenant would be replaced by a new one, written on hearts. James and John left their father, boats, and nets to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of people. Jesus taught his disciples, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again”

“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.”

The pattern of loss and renewal runs through our everyday lives as well.

We die many deaths throughout our lifetime. The loss of a loved one, a relationship, health, opportunities, a dream; all deaths we didn't want or ask for. At other times we choose our losses and deaths. We give up parts of ourselves for another. We change our beliefs and values so that we can be more authentically ourselves. And sometimes there are things we need to let go of, things we cling to that deny us the fullness of life we want and God offers: fear, anger or resentment, regret and disappointment, guilt, the need to be right, approval.

You've probably had at least one time in your life that you look back on and say, “I never want to go through that again. But I wouldn't trade that experience for anything.”

As difficult or painful as that experience was, it bore much fruit. Your perceptions were changed and your life was renewed. It was one of those times when you were the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. And I'd suggest it was one of those times when you knew you had seen Jesus, when you experienced the holy, when you were absolutely convinced that God was present and working in your life.

Seeing Jesus isn't a spectator sport. It is a way to be followed, a truth to be embodied, a life to be lived. It's being a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bear much fruit. That's where we see Jesus - in the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for new life to arise.

We are now five weeks into the Lenten season - this very special period leading into Easter when we are invited to pause and reflect on this pattern of loss and renewal. In particular we are challenged to let go of anything that might be holding us back from experiencing the fullness of life. Letting go is what allows us to be more authentically present to ourselves and to others. It makes room for new life and new ways of being present to arise. Our letting go gives God something with which to work. Why then would we continue to cling, to live as an isolated, self-enclosed, single grain of wheat?

“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.”

So what is the grain of wheat in your life today that needs to fall into the earth and die? What in your life do you need to let go of? What might you need to leave behind? What needs to die so that something new can arise? Maybe those things are the very seeds waiting to bear much fruit in your life. Maybe that's where you'll see Jesus.

But you don't plant a seed and go back in ten minutes or the next day and see a new sprout. Growth can be slow and the fruit of new life takes time, usually longer than we want it to. Yet, even when unseen, unbelieved, or unrecognized, the power and life of God are present and at work in the depths of our life, in the dark and hidden places, sprouting undreamed-of possibilities .

The pattern of loss and renewal will be unveiled every day across the next two weeks: through the hosannas of Palm Sunday and the trials of Holy Week, the washing of feet and the last supper, the cross and the tomb, to the dawn of a new day and the renewal of life. The single grain, having fallen into the ground, has become the Bread of Life. May this pattern also be revealed in our lives as we let go whatever needs to die, that we too may experience the immense joy of renewal.

Thanks be to God, Amen

HYMN TiS 382 Now the green blade rises

OFFERING and DEDICATION

Generous God, we give thanks for the fullness of our lives.
Receive these gifts, we pray, and bless their use
that they may be a blessing to others.
In Christ's name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Loving God,
into your care
we commit the prayers of our hearts
assured of your presence.

We pray for the environment
for creatures of the air and sea,
for trees and plants
for high mountains and for desert plains.
Where greed has brought destruction,
may we be moved to offer healing.

We pray for the human family
for refugees and asylum seekers
for new parents and for the dying
for the rich and for the poor.
May we be ever mindful that we are one,
that we belong to one another and that the fullness of life
depends on each of us living in wholeness.

We pray for ourselves
for times of great joy and deep sadness

(time of silence)

May we discover anew our home in you
that we might be shaped in our living.
We commit these prayers to you, and continue to pray in the words Jesus taught us,
saying:

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.***

HYMN TiS 595 O Jesus, I have promised

BLESSING

Friends, go from here knowing that God goes with you
into every part of life.
***Our calling and charge is to live fully for God.
We go in peace. Amen.***

HYMN TiS 782 Go now in peace