

USPG Climate Sermon – 21st March 2021

Lectionary Gospel reading: John 12:20 – 33

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!

Today is the 5th Sunday of Lent, observed as Passion Sunday.

In today's Gospel reading in John 12: 20 – 33, Jesus begins with announcing the hour of His glorification. **"The hour has come," began Jesus. "when the Son of Man should be glorified" John 12:23.**

It was clear that things had been building up to a crisis and that crisis had now come. But Jesus' idea of what that crisis involved was quite different from anyone else's. To the Jews the Son of Man stood for the undefeatable world conqueror sent by God as prophesied in the OT by Prophet Daniel (Daniel 7:1 – 8).

When Jesus made that announcement, the listeners would believe that the trumpet call of eternity had sounded, that the forces of heaven was on the march, and that the campaign of victory was on the move. But Jesus did not mean by 'glorified', what they understood. They thought of the conquest of the armies of God; Jesus meant the conquest of the Cross!

The announcement by Jesus would excite the hearts of those who heard it; but then subsequent sayings in vv24 – 26, it must have left them staggered and bewildered, for they spoke, not in terms of conquest, but in terms of sacrifice and death.

In John 12:24 – 26, we find the amazing paradox.

Here Jesus is teaching us three things, which are various elements of one central truth and all at the heart of the Christian faith and life.

1. Jesus was saying that **only by death comes life.**

- In John 12:24, Jesus says, **"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."**
- The grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was preserved. It was when thrown into the cold ground, and buried there as if in a tomb, that it bore fruit.
- When a man buries his personal aims and ambitions, then he begins to be of real use to God. By the death of personal desire and personal ambition a man becomes a servant of God.
- When we think in the context of current Climate crisis, it demands death to personal ambition, comfort and greed.
- Climate change has become one of the greatest crises of the day.
- Today the world has reached to a tipping point and unless urgent actions are taken by all nations and individuals, there will be catastrophic consequences on the planet earth.
- During this Lent, we are called to reflect at a deeper level; particularly when we are facing major crises
- At the heart of all these crises, there is human greed, selfishness and individualism
- We read in Genesis 1 the narration of creation story
- Everything was created to serve mankind. Man was given instruction to subdue the earth and dominion over the creation. It was implied stewardship – power to subdue but to care for God's creation
- Sadly, we have messed up the earth and whole of its environment

- Human greed has corrupted the earth and we all feel its consequences today
 - The words of Jesus in the John's gospel challenge us – *only by death comes life*. Death to greed, and selfish ambition.
2. Jesus was saying that **only by spending life, do we retain it**.
- In John 12:25, Jesus further says, “Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”
 - The man who loves his life is moved by two aims, by selfishness and by the desire for security. Many times, Jesus insisted that the man who hoarded his life must in the end lose it, and the man who spent his life must in the end gain it (Mark 8:35; Matthew 16:25; Luke 9:24; Matthew 10:39; Luke 17:33).
 - This is so appropriate particularly in the context of ecological justice and impact of climate change. Individuals and nations are called to live responsibly; to let go their personal comfort, and selfish gains.
 - Only by living responsibly we can retain good quality of life; by caring for environment, we can avoid disasters.
 - The Church of South India has shown great example in this area. They have kept environmental concern as one their mission priority.
 - The Green School programme of CSI educates children to live responsibly by taking care of their environment. You can read more about it in the USPG Lent study 2021, where week 5, focuses on the work of the Green school.
 - The following video clip will provide glimpse of Green school programme activity
 - <https://vimeo.com/510203032>
3. Jesus was saying that **only by service comes greatness**.
- In John 12:26, Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.”
 - The people whom the world remembers with love are the people who serve others.
 - Today our world is struggling under the impact of COVID-19. Within one year, globally there are 118 million cases and 2.6 million deaths.
 - We have heard about valiant efforts and selfless service of many volunteers, health workers who served tirelessly during this pandemic. There is great army of volunteers who are reaching out to people who were isolated and vulnerable, by providing food, medical help and supplies.

CONCLUSION

Jesus came to the Jews with a new view of life. They looked on glory as conquest, the acquisition of power, the right to rule. He looked on it as a cross.

He taught men that only by death comes life; that only by spending life do we retain it; that only by service comes greatness. And the extraordinary thing is that when we come to think of it, Christ's paradox is nothing other than the truth of common sense.

Pope Francis said, “Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is...Life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you.”

Amen!

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21st March 2021