

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Mar 18, 2018 – Lent 5

**How Do We Bear Much Fruit?
(Psalm 51:1-12 & John 12:20-33)**



**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.**

(John 12:24)

Overview

The series of teachings that Rick read for us this morning from the Gospel of John come just after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which we will consider next week – as did all the gospel writers, John gathers and orders and interprets events and teachings from Jesus' life to witness to his hearers and readers, as clearly as he can, what God was doing for the redemption of the world in Jesus, the messianic Son of Man – the One in and through whom the world would be saved – remember, for John, this all happened because God loved the world – in that light, let's take a quick and, I pray, a suggestive look at this image of the seed that Jesus uses to talk about his mission and how it bears fruit in the activities of the church – his continuing healing presence in the world

Provocative Points to Ponder

- The obvious reference in this passage is to Jesus himself – a single prophet with a few followers confronting the vast Roman empire with a different vision of living together – what kept him and his disciples going in the face of violent opposition was their conviction that they were participating in and contributing to God's mission – the glory/energy of the Creator who still loves the world so much that he will do anything to redeem and save it – if those people and forces in the world want to resist or ignore that intent, let them give it their best shot – it won't work – the glory of love that comes from God alone will, in the end, define the world – and the purpose and power of that love is seen most clearly in Jesus
- I didn't have time this week to explore how the farmers of Jesus' day understood the science of seeds – that's an interesting question, though – we can't just read our far more detailed and scientific understanding of what's going on in the germination and growth process back into their minds and imaginations – so, while we know that a seed is dormant rather than dead, they may not have thought in those terms – when they buried a seed, it was dead – but with the gifts of good growing weather and the application of good cultivation practices, grain would grow and bear much fruit – fruit essential to wellbeing – there's an annual cycle of dying and rising in ancient agricultural cultures that is manifest here – in a powerful sense, the past is dead and gone – everything will sprout and blossom and bear fruit anew – if God is kind and if we care for the crops well – in the Galilean villages where Jesus spent most of his ministry, this

image would have been immediate and powerful – we die and are creating anew by God – it happens best and most fruitfully if we play our part in the cultivation process well

- And what is that part? – think again about the agrarian society in which Jesus lived – that part is cultivating, harvesting, distributing, thinking ahead to next year's planting/cultivating/harvesting, adapting as well as possible to the things that interfered with a good harvest, etc – our part is to glorify and enjoy God (cf the 1st question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism) by cultivating and distributing the fruits of the salvation that Christ gave the world in and into all our circles of influence – wherever God leads us in the ordinary cycles of our lives – and it is precisely in that ordinariness that the extraordinary miracle of God's salvation shows up and heals – that's what we cultivate, in friendship with Jesus Christ, with every breath that we take

So, what do we do with this?

I hope these suggestions about some ways to dig deeper into the meaning of this teaching of Jesus has provoked some insights that you can ponder further and practice this week – for me, it's raised the possibility of focusing on one attitude and behaviour that is getting in the way of me cultivating and distributing more fruit in my contributions to God's saving of the world – what's been emerging is the possibilities God has created for me to have conversations about the meaning of the Christian faith with people I meet by chance – in restaurants, through the jazz circles we have cultivated, through the Philosophers' Cafes that we host – sowing seeds of an alternative way to see and glorify God's saving of the world – they may never end up in one of our chairs here in the sanctuary – or they may – but having sowed the seeds, we trust in God to cultivate more fruit than we can every imagine

Your Notes

Frameworks for our Prayers

Thanks – for your regularity in the cycles of nature that provide with both nourishment for our bodies and joy for our souls – for the significance and meaning that you offer to us as cultivators of your creativity in the ordinary things of our lives – where you make the extraordinary happen in ways that delight and amaze us – (a time of silence for conversing with God about these realities in your lives)

Help – to see more clearly the opportunities that you provide for cultivating the seeds of your glory in the ordinary cycles of our lives – places where and people with whom we can share the fruits of the riches of your love that you have nourished in us – and give us the courage to imagine creative ways of sharing your glory through our lives – (a time of silence for conversing with God about these realities in your lives)

Awe – at the ways in which you show up in the ordinary cycles of our lives with creative compassion – (a time of silence for conversing with God about these realities in your lives)