



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, March 17, 2024

Beloved Dust: God-Life
Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

*What does daylight-saving time mean in Enumclaw?
An extra hour of rain.*

*What did the long-time resident of Enumclaw say to the Pillsbury
Doughboy?
Nice tan.*

*"I can't believe it," said a tourist. "I've been here an entire week and it's
done nothing but rain. When do you have summer here?"
"Well, that's hard to say," replied the local. "Last year, it was on a
Wednesday."*

*A newcomer to our area arrives on a rainy day. He gets up the next day
and it's raining. It also rains the day after that, and the day after that. He
goes out to lunch and sees a young kid and asks out of despair, "Hey kid,
does it ever stop raining around here?" The kid says, "How do I know? I'm
only 6."*

Spring is a time when winter rains end, and the weather turns more mild...

Today, we are enjoying a beautiful spring day, but we don't know how long this weather will last. But we are enjoying coming out of a season of dormancy.

To better understand our scripture passage today...to embrace the Passover season and the promises of Easter, we need to gaze through the lens of Spring—the lens of Hope. We must put ourselves in the sandals of those who walked our faith heritage before us and follow why they wanted to put the celebration of deliverance and new life on a calendar at the dawn of Spring.

Easter and Passover emphasize our shared history and our shared hope—we remember God’s steadfast faithfulness, stories of deliverance and redemption in our ancient writings...and we claim the promises of resurrection emphasized by the observations of renewed life that we know in nature.

- Easter looks back to Passover customs that we practice in our Judeo-Christian traditions.
- As recorded in scripture, Jesus celebrated Passover with his friends numerous times...
- Jesus is called the Passover lamb (by Paul) ...and he claims this identity for himself.
- Passover tradition includes the phrase “in remembrance of the lamb”, and so his disciples would have understood a deeper meaning when Jesus says “in remembrance of me” at the last supper.
- Jesus also says, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”*—This is how we know that Jesus identifies with the Passover lamb. And this is why red wine was traditionally used to represent the blood that redeems humanity (as you may recall it was lamb’s blood on the door posts God’s people in the Exodus story of deliverance).
- Passover and Lent are seasons of preparing for celebration.
- Passover and Easter celebrate deliverance...freedom from slavery...freedom from the slavery of sin.
- Passover and Lent are a personal journey of freedom as well as a communal reality...

SCRIPTURE & REFLECTIONS

John 12:20-33/New International Version

Jesus Predicts His Death

²⁰*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.*

²¹*They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."*

²²*Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.*

It was not uncommon for non-Jews, gentiles, Greeks to come into the Jewish community during the Passover season, but in our story today these "outsiders" were not going to the temple but sought Jesus himself. They wanted to see Jesus. Jesus is the location of God's glory and presence. Jesus' mission is indeed "in-gathering" ...Jesus gathers others to himself. The Gentiles in John 12 are drawn to Jesus rather than the temple.

Do we draw others to Jesus or to our church? Jesus came to draw the world to himself.

Isaiah 56:7-8

The Message

⁶⁻⁸*"And as for the outsiders who now follow me, working for me, loving my name, and wanting to be my servants—*

*All who keep Sabbath and don't defile it, holding fast to my covenant—
I'll bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.*

They'll be welcome to worship the same as the 'insiders,' to bring burnt offerings and sacrifices to my altar.

Oh yes, my house of worship will be known as a house of prayer for all people."

*The Decree of the Master, God himself, who gathers in the exiles of Israel:
"I will gather others also, gather them in with those already gathered."*

"I will gather to him a gathering" (ISAIAH 56:7). The word **synago** means gathering in Hebrew. Jesus is bringing together the whole world. Maybe this is the tipping point for him to declare that finally his hour has come.

²³*Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

Jesus' hour has come—this refers to his death. By passing through death, he will achieve for all of us the fullness of life. It may feel like an odd way to respond to the news that people were trying to see him. But Jesus is sensing that it is time for new life, but before he can be resurrected, he must first die. It is the beauty of decay and death and dormancy in nature. Death is not the end of the story. Death is only the prelude to a new life in Christ.

All life, our life, is a cyclical journey...as we grow, as we learn, as we mature...we know that we must allow things to die, we must let go of assumptions, prejudices, ideologies, falsehoods...life is learning. Life is learning that sometimes we need to die...

This we know is also true for us, for our churches, for our communities. We need to let go of things in order to live into a more abundant life. And, according to John just two chapters before today's passage, Jesus came to bring us life—abundant life. Jesus says that this life is a gathering life.

Perhaps their hopes and dreams of the immediate coming of God's kingdom had to die so that the new practice of seeking out the Holy Spirit's presence in the mundane details of daily life could be born...God is not done using us and our community to bear much fruit. (Pres-Outlook).

²⁴Very 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.

Jesus responds immediately with some seed teachings...his audience are very familiar with the basics of agriculture. Jesus is a seed that must fall into the ground to germinate a harvest that encompasses the whole world. He tells everyone who is listening that death is a necessary precondition of the life that he offers. This is the reality of farmers, and it is the reality of those who seek to follow after Jesus.

²⁵Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates (rejects) their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Echoes in the Synoptics (Matt 10:38, Mark 8:35, Luke 14:27)

³⁸Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

³⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁶*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

²⁷*"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.*

In the Synoptics, Jesus asks God to take the cup of death from him, but John's Jesus proclaims that he will NOT ask for this cup to pass him by...

His hour has come...he predicts his death.

²⁸*Father, glorify your name!"*

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

The Father and son are always on the same page—glory...the glory of each is the love that they share. Jesus and the Father are always one. From the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

²⁹*The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

³⁰*Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine.*

It is not enough to come to Jesus or want to see him; we must have our ears unclogged, and our vision corrected by the truth that is Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. We can't avoid the darkness, but we can cling to Jesus' promise that he will light our paths toward life.

And this life in Christ is a communal life. Jesus emphasizes a collective discipleship throughout his ministry. The Hebrew scriptures emphasize the wisdom and power of walking with others—two are better than one, a

cord of three braids not easily broken. Jesus reminds us that where two or three are gathered, he is also present.

Jesus responds to people gathering to come and see him with the proclamation that this is why he came to gather others to himself. God so loved the world that Jesus was sent...for those of us who cling to only the individual nature of our discipleship, we might want to consider what dying to self really means...dying to self may be our getting over our self and embracing 'outsiders' in a way worthy of the cross. We limit God, but Jesus says God's love is more expansive, more inclusive, vaster than you can possibly imagine.

Dying to self may be letting our narrow ideas about God's love die. I imagine that the disciples did not embrace the words of Jesus when he predicted his death. I can't imagine the twinge of grief that they felt or the gut punch of hearing such words from their beloved friend and rabbi. Jesus asked them, and is asking us, to allow his truth, his love, his death, his resurrection to permeate the deepest recesses of our souls. Jesus is pleading with all of us to let go...let God...let death and life reveal the glory of the One who loves us...to let the author of life, the source of all breath, the lover of our souls to teach us the wondrous blessing that comes from dying to self and opening our heart to the truth of God—that is the Love of God.

Blessing the Seed

(inspired by John 12:24)

I should tell you
at the outset
this blessing will require you
to do some work.

First you must simply
let this blessing fall
from your hand,
as if it were a small thing
you could easily let slip
through your fingers,

as if it were not
most precious to you,
as if your life did not
depend on it.

Next you must trust
that this blessing knows
where it is going,
that it understands
the ways of the dark,
that it is wise
to seasons
and to times.

Then—
and I know this blessing
has already asked much
of you—
it is to be hoped that
you will rest
and learn
that something is at work
when all seems still,
seems dormant,
seems dead.

I promise you
this blessing has not
abandoned you.
I promise you
this blessing
is on its way back
to you.
I promise you—
when you are least
expecting it,
when you have given up
your last hope—

this blessing will rise
green
and whole
and new.

~ written by Jan L. Richardson

³¹Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

³³He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

MAY IT BE SO.

