

March 21, 2021

Fifth Sunday in Lent



**“The days are surely coming”
Jeremiah 31:31**

St. John United Church of Christ

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Prayers and Liturgy by
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Jeremiah 31:31-34 Psalm 51:1-12
Hebrew 5:5-10 John 12:20-33

CALL TO WORSHIP: Let us gather to worship.

O God, we wish to see Jesus!

We come to worship, to pray, and learn.

We come looking for Jesus in Scripture lessons,
in our own life experiences,
in helping our world,
in prayers for each other.

We seek to follow in the way of Jesus.

We lay bare before God and one another
our own wilderness journey
filled with some gladness and hope,
with reluctance and sorrow,
with fear and confusion.

O God, speak to us, show us, touch us with your presence!

Let our Lenten journey lead us to Jesus,
so that we may show Jesus forth

in our lives, our faith community, and our world. Amen.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

God of the journey, you invite us, the church,
“to accept the cost and joy of discipleship”

and “to be your servants in the service of others.”

In so doing, may your presence be our guide and Jesus our
model. May we respond to you in loving faithfulness.

Amen

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Based on Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great
compassion.

Wash me completely clean of my guilt;
Purify me from my sin! Because I know my wrongdoings,
my sin is always right in front of me.
I've sinned against you – you alone. I've committed evil in
your sight. That's why you are justified when you render
your verdict, completely correct when you issue your
judgment.
And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places; you
teach me wisdom in the most secret space.
Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will
be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and celebration again; let the bones you
crushed rejoice once more. Hide your face from my sins;
wipe away all my guilty deeds!
Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit
deep inside me!
Please don't throw me out of your presence; please don't
take your holy spirit away from me.
Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a
willing spirit. (Silence for personal confession.)

ASSURANCE OF PARDON: This is the good news – God is
eager to forgive our sins and rejoices each time we try
again. From our gratitude comes a new life.

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 31:31-34 ³¹The time is coming,
declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with
the people of Israel and Judah. ³²It won't be like the
covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by
the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke
that covenant with me even though I was their husband,

declares the LORD. ³³No, this is the covenant that I will make
with the people of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. I
will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on
their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my
people. ³⁴They will no longer need to teach each other to
say, "Know the LORD!" because they will all know me, from
the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD; for I will
forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their
sins.

Hebrews 5:5-10 ⁵In the same way Christ also didn't
promote himself to become high priest. Instead, it was the
one who said to him, "*You are my Son.*
Today I have become your Father," ⁶as he also says in
another place, "*You are a priest forever,*
according to the order of Melchizedek.

⁷During his days on earth, Christ offered prayers and
requests with loud cries and tears as his sacrifices to the
one who was able to save him from death. He was heard
because of his godly devotion. ⁸Although he was a Son, he
learned obedience from what he suffered. ⁹After he had
been made perfect, he became the source of eternal
salvation for everyone who obeys him. ¹⁰He was appointed
by God to be a high priest according to the order of
Melchizedek.

GOSPEL READING: John 12:20-33 ²⁰Some Greeks were
among those who had come up to worship at the
festival. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in
Galilee, and made a request: "Sir, we want to see

Jesus.”²² Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. ²⁴ I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

²⁷ “Now I am deeply troubled. What should I say? ‘Father, save me from this time’? No, for this is the reason I have come to this time. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!”

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

²⁹ The crowd standing there heard and said, “It’s thunder.” Others said, “An angel spoke to him.”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “This voice wasn’t for my benefit but for yours. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment of this world. Now this world’s ruler will be thrown out. ³² When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (³³ He said this to show how he was going to die.)

MESSAGE: “What Time is It?”

In all three of our readings today, there is reference to time. See if you can find what time it is.

As we approach the end of a season of penitence and preparation, Jeremiah anticipates a particular aspect of the good news of Easter, that God will transform human hearts. But just as Easter comes only after the death of Jesus, so in

Jeremiah’s vision of the future the new covenant comes only through and beyond suffering, in this case that of the Babylonian Exile. Thus, these hopeful words come from a time of crisis and transition, when many people could have been asking if God’s covenant with the people had come to an end. Jeremiah insists that judgment is not God’s final word. The epistolary lection focuses on the suffering of Christ. (*As the saying goes, you can’t get to Easter without Good Friday.*)

And now, according to the Gospel of John, “the hour has come” for the Son of Man to be glorified.” The glorifying of the Son is this Gospel writer’s way of referring to the death, resurrection, and exaltation to former glory of the one who became flesh and dwelt among us. By his announcement that the hour has come, Jesus is telling his disciples and us that the chain of events leading to his passion will now begin.

Our gospel lesson begins with Greeks asking to meet Jesus. Jesus’ discourse that follows is, in part, a response to this request. (*Mentioning the Greeks who wish to follow Jesus is another indication that this message will reach many nations including gentiles.*) If you wish to see Jesus, then this is what you will and must see. The Gospel of John has as its goal, that the very real presence of Jesus that needs to be experienced by any or all of our human senses.

An immediate example of how Jesus’ last public words foreshadow his personal words to the disciples is the image offered in John 12:24. The metaphor of bearing fruit will receive fuller treatment in the image of the vine and the branches in chapter 15. Verse 25 is further commentary on the agricultural metaphor presented in verse 24, but viewed

through the lens of the Farewell Lesson has less to do with function of Jesus' death as it does with the possibility of what the disciples will do when Jesus is gone. They will do greater works than these (John 14:12) because Jesus is returning to the Father. So much of these last lessons from Jesus is about the discipleship. To serve Jesus (John 13:16) is to follow Jesus and to do the works that he did, to feed and tend his sheep, and to testify on behalf of Jesus.

This is the moment of judgment because this is the last time the "world" will hear Jesus' words. To listen to Jesus is to believe in him and now is the time – the last chance. The ruler of this world will be cast out, which will be acted out in the next chapter, with the departure of Judas to the dark side (13:27-30). *(This is another example by which to know that what Jesus says is true.)*

Verses 32-33 at first glance seems to foreshadow the crucifixion. At the same time, literally, "what sort of death he was about to die" suggests that the "sort of death" includes also that that death leads to his resurrection and ascension. When Jesus is lifted up from the earth to draw all people to himself, that lifting up is simultaneously all three events: crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus must prepare his disciples for his twice departure, his death and his ascension.

What time is it? Its time for us to think about what will happen during "holy week" and the joy of Easter while remembering to prepare for Jesus truly leaving the scene at Ascension. Will we run away or answer the call to discipleship with a committed **YES!** Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING:

Jesus compels us to join him in service to others. Our church accepts the invitation and challenge to show Jesus' Way using the resources we share.

Let us give as we are able to the ministries of our church.

DEDICATION: God, there are many who "wish to see Jesus." In joy and celebration of the many gifts that we share, we ask you to bless all of our offerings.

May Jesus shine in all the world. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Dear God. We thank you for today, for being with us, accepting our worship and prayers, and for guiding us on our way.

Bless us as we go, and in turn, may we bless others.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

CONDOLENCES to Barb Whitaker and Janice Petroff on the death of Barb's son, Andrew.

PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for:

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Becky Ballard, P.J. Bennett, Nelson Libell, Joe Knapp.