

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength, and our Redeemer. Amen

I love working with the soil and with seeds. I prefer to do this in a glass greenhouse, with its controlled environment and safe conditions for the germination and propagation of plants. I love the smell of the earth, the silent bursting forth of new life, and the glory of God's creation all around me. I love the warmth of the Sun streaming in through the glass, the smell, the smell of life and earth blended together, as new growth springs forth. And of course, I love just being part of God's gift of Creation.

When I plant a seed in the soil, I cannot expect to come back in ten minutes time and see that the seed has already sprouted. Growth takes time, and I need to wait for new life to emerge from that one little seed. Usually, it takes longer than I would like it to take. You see, in my enthusiasm I expect results immediately after I plant that seed. Yet, in the soil, and given the right conditions, that little seed dies to what it was, just a seed; and is transformed into new life, a new plant capable of producing many more seeds as it grows and flourishes.

This cycle of one thing dying to give rise to something new is the pattern of loss and renewal which happens throughout all

our lives. Look around yourself. Look at the cycles of nature. Think about the trees. Think about how they lose their leaves in the Fall of one year, lay dormant over the winter months, and then re-emerge with new life in the warmth of the Spring as the sun warms the earth and the plants, and all God's Creation. Then think about the situation we have endured over the past years of the COVID Pandemic. We have all seen our lives changed. Many of the old ways in which we lived our daily lives have ceased and will never be regained. Yet, out of this time of loss, we are seeing new ways of sharing, new ways of being ourselves, and new ways of knowing the joys of being community once again.

This pattern of loss and renewal can be summed up something like this – in dying and rising again; or another way - by letting go and getting back even more; or by leaving something only to return in some different form, in each of these examples, life goes on. In many ways, we are better for losing something, and then gaining much in the way new life comes forth. We need to allow ourselves to see the beauty of Creation, and of life all around us, and new life welling up within us.

Today, we come to the last of Jesus' acts of public ministry. Again, he is teaching the disciples and the crowds. Philip and Andrew draw his attention to Greeks who desire to see him.

Here, Jesus realizes that he is now seeing the first signs of his ministry reaching to people beyond his own nation of Israel.

In this moment, the Greeks represent much more than just themselves. They represent all of humanity. Their role here is to show the world is coming to recognize Jesus as more than some gifted preacher. Jesus himself, also realizes in that moment, the kingdom of heaven is spreading into places far beyond Galilee and Jerusalem. He understands that the hour has now come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He also realizes that being glorified will come at a huge cost, his own death.

Jesus has been moulding his followers into the leaders who will carry on his ministry after he is gone. Soon, they will be charged with doing the work of spreading the “Good News”. And this will be new and different for them without Jesus to guide them. When the disciples and the crowds hear Jesus predicting that he will be lifted-up and all the world will be drawn to him, they struggle to understand what he is saying. But Jesus understands what lies before him. He knows the will of the Creator. And when the Creator expresses delight, the crowd hears the voice of God echo as thunder around them, but Jesus hears the Creator saying to him, I have glorified my name and I am still glorifying my name in you, my beloved Son. God expresses unconditional love for the Son of Man and affirms that love in the words we hear in John 3:16 “God so

loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.” In that moment, God has put all humanity on notice that He has been and will be continuing to be about in the world, doing the work of driving out the evil one, Satan, the ruler of this world from every corner of Creation.

Through the passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and with the promise of the return of Christ glorified, God is telling us that He is still present in the world through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit among us. Not as a one-time event, but actively working in our age, in our own time, working to drive Satan from this place and from all God’s created order.

Let’s take a moment to look at some of the healings and miracles which Jesus performed throughout his ministry. Scripture tells us that Jesus repeatedly drove out many demons and this resulted in the healing of many. And again, in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the devil, but did not give into temptation. Jesus, again and again, prevailed over the forces of evil, evil which was directed toward him. And that same evil remains present in all creation, even today. We are tempted daily, in this life we share. And we need to ask for God’s help to resist temptation in our lives. And Jesus is our help.

Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, suffered and died for each one of us so that we might have eternal life, as promised in John 3:16. The Cross of Christ is not a sign of failure. Rather the Cross is the place of victory. Through the Cross, we know that God has claimed victory over the evil power of this world. And we know that God is at work claiming victory over the forces of evil, even today.

Do you remember how the gospel of John starts? Let me share these words from John, chapter 1, verses 1-5 with you, once again. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

These are such powerful words of faith for us to hold on to. Over the next two weeks, we will once again recount the events, the sights and sounds, and tragedies that befall Jesus as He accomplishes the work of redeeming humankind.

And we need to remember this, God has been working in this world to overcome the evil one, and this is not just an event or events that have happened in the past tense. God’s in-dwelling among us is a process which will continue until the

second coming of Jesus Christ. And just as the evil one confronted Jesus again and again in his ministry, evil remains pervasive in our world today. Yet, we have God's promise of eternal life through our faith in the power of Jesus Christ glorified.

Jesus suffered and died, and rose again that we might have life abundant, and for this, we are indeed thankful. And do you know what I just realized, this is the same promise God has made for all believers throughout all time. Amen.