

The Mystery of the Grain of Wheat

Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: John 12:20-24



²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

"Jerusalem is the center of the world. From here, God will one day do something great." That was the belief among all the Israelites. And this very Jerusalem was crumbling. Because everyone was only speaking about Jesus! Nearly all were hopeful and excited! Is He the one who's supposed to come and make everything better? But there were also those in opposition. In the upper circles of Jerusalem, the enemies of Jesus held meeting after meeting. And it was all about how to get Jesus out of the way. This situation was so exciting that even some Greeks searched for Jesus: They wanted only one thing: They wanted to see Jesus! Who was this Jesus? Even more, who is this Jesus still for us today? Because we, too, are here today solely because we want to see Jesus!

When the Greeks found Jesus, He stood in the middle. He stood in the middle of two very different paths. Behind Jesus was a successful mission and a crowd of people who believed in Him and His works. Jesus alone knew that His earthly works would not meet a glorious end. Jesus would not boost His popularity among the people to gain even more power. He could have done that. But He didn't. Instead, Jesus chose a more difficult path. Everything that He built; everything He fought for and what He achieved with great effort and sacrifice would be wiped out and destroyed. Jesus had to die. Even worse: He had to suffer. And despite everything, Jesus can say His "yes" to it all. Jesus knows that the path to the depths is the right way. He knows that this path is the path God willed. He knows that this is the only way to bring His mission to completion. To explain that, Jesus used the mystery of a grain of wheat. The law of a grain of wheat is simple to understand. Wheat is a useful and healthy food. Its worth can be immediately enjoyed as it is eaten. When it has been eaten, it is no longer there, and its use is ended. But such a grain of wheat can also be planted in the ground. Planting such a grain of wheat in the ground is not a harmless process. It hurts! And it brings death! The grain of wheat must be planted in the dark ground where it can't be seen anymore and where it must perish so that it can be the foundation for a new life. The grain of wheat, that is planted in the ground, is much more useful than the grain of wheat that is immediately eaten! The mystery of Jesus is exactly like this grain of

wheat. At that time, the disciples, some Greeks, and all of Israel could be excited about Jesus. Jesus was God among us! Who wouldn't want to experience that? Imagine you were there and had seen Jesus. Imagine you had experienced His love. Imagine you had received faith from Him. Your life would suddenly be completely whole in His care and you could have said: Finally, I have reached my goal! Finally, I have tasted eternal life! But imagine this same Jesus had then said to you: He would voluntarily die. He would suffer and die! You would have been terribly shocked with everyone else. And Jesus did exactly that. But just like the grain of wheat, Jesus would bear much fruit through His death. He would be with the Father and be glorified. At the same time, He would also be with us. Not only with some people in Jerusalem, but throughout the whole world. And at all times. Jesus would not only be there where two or three are gathered, but He would be there on numerous altars throughout the whole world. In many generations and in many languages, He would be the One God appointed. God among us!

Jesus explained all that and He said even more. The law of the grain of wheat applies also to every Christian. Not that every Christian is a Christ. But the path Jesus went on will also be decisive for us. We Christians cannot and must not add to Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. And yet Jesus says that in following Him, we must die to many things that are otherwise important to us. The parable of the grain of wheat can accurately relate to faith in Jesus. When I take my time in my private life and use this time to read the Bible, to pray, or to go to church, then it is true that I must give up something of myself. Just as when I serve someone in Christ's love and do something good for him. Then I take my time, my patience, and my life in my hands and pass some of it on to others. It is even possible that one must be prepared to sacrifice their own life because of their faith in Jesus. It can be that we must die for our faith. And that still happens to this day in many countries of the world. All these things are not harmless. They hurt. And if we must give up something from our life, it really goes against our feelings. It's exactly like when I am very hungry and must then plant the last grains of wheat I have in my possession in the dark ground so that they can die. It goes against our nature. The natural person wants God? Yes! But then God must be worth it for us. But when God interrupts my life and my plans, then I quickly lay Him aside. Jesus? Yes, Jesus must help me. He must help me so that I feel better, so that I can get the right of residency here in Germany. But if Jesus costs me something... "Oh no, we can't afford that." With all our pious chatter, we humans are selfish, forgetful of God, and comfortable. We are 100 percent focused on this world and not on God. But the conflicting thing is that we, in our attempt to find ourselves, have just lost ourselves! We are exactly like the one who doesn't believe that the grain wheat bears much fruit when it is planted in the ground. We would much rather eat up the grain of wheat. But then it's gone. And we remain unfree! God doesn't want to limit our life. He doesn't want us to have less life and little joy. On the contrary. God wants us to have more from life. That's why Jesus came. We people will all go the same way as the grain of wheat. Whether we want it or not, we will become old, we will become sick... and at some point, we will lose a person or something important to our lives. Not one of us can say that it is easy. We all suffer when something like that happens. But Jesus wants to teach us about the mystery of the grain of wheat with all of this. He wants to teach us that we must not latch onto our small moments of happiness. Instead, we can hold fast to Jesus. He is the first grain of wheat from whom we all come. And from Jesus, we receive life, even when we lose it. Then it is possible to lose on the one hand, but on the other, become much richer. In faith in Jesus, mishaps and misfortune can happen to us, just like all other people. But no sorrow can get us down. Because Jesus makes us free!

Martin Luther writes: "You lift us up when You humble us; You lead us to heaven when You cast us to hell; You give us the victory when You let us succumb; You make us alive when You let us die.

With everything that happens in our life, we human beings can only see the one side. We can only see the side of person who must plant his precious grains of wheat in the dark earth. And that hurts! But God sees the other side. God alone sees the fruit that comes from these grains of wheat. And we ourselves will marvel in the end at where God produced new fruit right in the midst of the dark times of our lives. Amen.