

Holy Tuesday
St. John 12:24-43
March 26th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

If It Die, It Beareth Much Fruit

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, in yesterday’s Gospel reading from this same chapter of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John’s Gospel, Mary, the sister of Lazarus anointed the feet of our Lord + Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. Our Lord told His disciples, especially Judas Iscariot, that she did this in preparation for His burial. We were reminded that Lazarus had been raised from the dead. The Gospel pericope for Holy Monday was filled with imagery of death, burial, and resurrection. Here on Holy Tuesday this same theme also plays a significant role in today’s Gospel text.

Our Lord + Jesus compares His death to a grain of wheat going into the ground. In order for a grain of wheat to produce fruit—to produce many more grains of wheat—it must go into the ground and be buried. A grain of wheat must die before it can beareth much fruit. We know what the fruit of a grain of wheat is. Is a head of grain full of more wheat berries. One grain of wheat can produce hundreds of wheat berries. Its death produces much more life. Its death gives food to the eater. Its death gives bread to the sower. When it falls into good ground it beareth much fruit.

This is the image that our Lord uses to describe His death. He must die and be buried in the grave. If He dies and is buried, He beareth much fruit. We know what fruit a grain of wheat produces, but what fruit does our Lord’s death produce? Our Lord has been called the “Firstfruits of the dead.” Like a grain of wheat dying in the ground, our Lord + Jesus has also been buried in the ground dead. Like a grain of wheat rising out of the ground to bear much fruit; to produce a field of myriads upon myriads of new wheat berries, our Lord also rises from the dead on the third day to give new life to all those who cling to Him in faith. He is the Firstfruits of all those who will, through faith, rise again from the dead. We are the fruit our Lord + Jesus bears. All those who cling to Him in faith, through the work of the Holy Ghost in the means of grace, are the fruits that He beareth.

The Church beareth much fruit on account of the Firstfruits of the dead, our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. This is why our Lord says in the ending of yesterday’s Gospel reading to Sts. Philip and Andrew, that, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.” What glory is there in death? There

is no glory. Death is the end of our earthly lives. There is no glory in death. So then, how can our Lord + Jesus say that the hour of His glory is come? Because His death is not the end. It is the beginning. It is the beginning of producing much life. His death opens up the gates of Heaven for all of us poor, miserable sinners who cling to Him in faith for the remission of our sins. The hour of His glory is that His crucifixion pays the penalty for sins. For His sacrifice is an innocent and sinless sacrifice. He is the pure Lamb of God without blemish or defect.

His innocent suffering and death buys us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. They no longer possess us. They no longer have power over us. Our Lord has claimed the victory over them through His death and burial. He makes life out of death, just like a grain of wheat that goes into the ground and dies. He beareth much fruit. He produces much life. For He has conquered sin and death's reign over us and all mankind. By this willing sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, + Jesus, the Christ, He fulfills the heavenly Father's will to redeem mankind from their sins. This is why the heavenly Father is also glorified.

His Name is glorified because the Son of God has obeyed the Father's will and redeemed mankind from their sins and trespasses. This is the promise that He made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after their fall into sin. This is the promise that He repeated throughout the Old Testament history through the prophets and patriarchs. The heavenly Father would send a Messiah—a Christ—Whom He has anointed to be a Prophet, Priest, and King over all mankind, especially of them that believe on Him. To these He will give the crown of eternal life. To all those who remain faithful He will crown with eternal life, and they will join Him in Heaven with all of the saints and angels who now stand before His throne dressed in white robes and carrying palm branches. These ones will sing His praise forever and ever. For they have been raised out of death into eternal life.

But St. John also provides his readers with a warning. For he writes that even though the Lord + Jesus had done many signs, even the sign of raising Himself up from the dead, many still did not believe on Him. The Prophet Isaiah had prophesied this. He said, "He hath blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; Lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them." St. John points out that this is a result of their offense at the crucifixion of the Lord + Jesus.

In order for the Lord to be dead and buried and the third day rise again from the dead, He must first be lifted up on the tree of the holy cross. The Son of Man must be lifted up. He must endure suffering and pain on the tree of the cross, even as we heard from the Passion History of St. Mark. He must endure the punishment that we have earned by our many and countless sins. He must endure the pain and suffering that we and all mankind deserve on account of our many transgressions. For in doing this the whole world is judged. The whole world's sins are atoned for. And if the sins of the whole world have been atoned for, the devil, that evil accuser of old, must be cast out of the earth, for he no longer has any more power to accuse anyone of sins, for they have been paid in full.

An innocent death is undeserving of death. Therefore, the Lord + Jesus cannot stay dead in the grave. He must be raised again. He must produce new life. This is why all those who cling to faith in Him are drawn to Him. For we look upon His suffering and death displayed in the crucifixes in our sanctuary, and homes, and know that this is the punishment that we rightly deserve. Our Lord is innocent of such treatment. But we could never atone for our own sins, let alone the sins of the whole world, for we are born and conceived in sin. We are full of sin from our mother's womb. Our death will not produce life; not even our own. The Son of God, however, if He suffers and dies, and goes into the grave, will bear much fruit. He will give life and salvation to all those who cling to Him in faith. For He has won forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation by His innocent suffering and death upon the tree of the holy cross.

If a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it beareth much fruit. For it will be food for all those who are hungry for bread. Our Lord is the Bread of Life. He gives us to eat of His Body and Blood in bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. This Sacrament gives us new life in Him, for it creates and sustains faith in us and fervent love for one another and for our Lord God. We have this meal because of our Lord's crucifixion and death. This meal that is because He died and was buried, produces new life in us. For by it we remember and proclaim His death. His death has won life for us.

Therefore, my dear friends, our Lord + Jesus has become the Firstfruits of the dead. He is the first to be raised out of death. We who cling to Him in faith have also been raised out of death in the waters of Holy Baptism. We have been given a new life. We will join our Lord in Heaven, and stand among the multitudes robed in white and carry palm branches and sing the eternal liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. For our Lord is now glorified among us, and will be glorified forever and ever. He has conquered sin and death, and given life and immortality to us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!