

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Like The Broken Bread

Lesson: John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 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 it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

I had a joy during the week and I heard some sad news. First, my joy is my son’s birthday was this past Friday and he became one-year old now. My wife and I shared our memories together by looking at Evan’s pictures from birth to now. We hugged each other, saying we did our best for the year. March 18th, last year is the day before Evan was born; she and I went to the hospital that night because she was feeling strong contractions. I remember walking for two hours in the hospital hallway with her while awaiting Evan’s arrival. Since he was born, our time has flown. And, so many things happened in the meantime. In South Korea, the first birthday is called Dol. My grandparents’ generation gave birth to many children and raised them. One of the reasons they gave birth to a lot of children is because of the high infant mortality rate of the time. Therefore, it was one of the big things to have a baby 100 days old in Korea, and one year old was one of the great things to celebrate. So, the 100th days old and the first birthday of babies became a meaningful tradition in Korea to celebrate.

Today, of course, infant mortality is significantly lower than in the past, but the tradition is still maintained. The 100th day party and the first birthday party are one of the big parties in Korea. On this day, people invite their whole family, relatives, and friends. Many Koreans enjoy this feast by renting a hotel banquet room. So, the host of the party would spend a lot of money for the party like a wedding. However, we didn't have a chance to go to Korea because of COVID-19, so we saved money! Just like smashed cake tradition of the U.S. on the first birthday, in Korea, Koreans have a tradition called Doljabi. In the party, parents put several things like pens, money, yarn, a bow, a stethoscope, a hammer of a judge and so on in front of baby. Then, the baby picks up one of those items. Depending on what the baby chooses, we can say what the baby is going to be. For example, if a baby chooses money, the baby is destined to become rich in the future. Of course, Koreans don't believe the superstition, but we do it for fun. For your information, my mom said I chose a pen, which means a smart person, a professor, a writer, and so on. Additionally, yarn means long life. A bow means a general or a sportsman. I assume that you know the meaning of a stethoscope and a hammer of a judge.

The sad news I've heard is that about racism against Asians and Asian Americans has been increasing since last March. During the last year, 3,800 cases of racism against Asians were reported. In particular, the recent shooting in Atlanta broke many people's hearts. What I learned from the Bishop Jung's pastoral letter was that the gunman in Atlanta was a devout Southern Baptist. This sad event asks us questions about what it is to live as a Christian in the world and what it is to live as a disciple.

According to today's gospel lesson, "among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. (20) They came to Philip and said, "We want to see Jesus," so Philip and Andrew and the Greeks came to Jesus." (21-22) The Bible doesn't describe what the Greeks asked Jesus, but perhaps they asked about eternal life, the afterlife, etc. Then Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (24) This is very famous words and it is the principle of nature. This parable of one grain of wheat tells what will happen to Jesus. And Jesus said that "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (25), and said "whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." (26) These three sentences Jesus told seem different but look alike.

Jesus said that “if a grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruit,” “those who hate their life will keep it for eternal life,” and “whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” What these three things have in common is self-sacrifice. Surprisingly, just before he said these things, he said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (23) For Jesus, self-sacrifice meant the glory of God. Also, in verse 28, self-sacrifice is described as the glory of God.

The parable of a grain of wheat is deeply related to Holy Communion. On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us he took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.” By eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ, Jesus Christ entered their bodies and gave them a new life. Just as the bread was broken and eaten by the disciples, Jesus, who was innocent, was crucified for our sins or our debts. He broke his body for us just as he broke the bread. When we believe and accept this truth, the Holy Spirit lives in our bodies, our hearts, and our souls, and we are born again as a new life.

In fact, being born again is not enough. Jesus showed an example through his crucifixion for us. Just as he broke his body for us like he broke the bread, we should also break our bodies for others like him. Just as he did, we should break our lives for the poor. Just as he did, we should break our lives for the marginalized. Just as he did, we should break our lives for those who are discriminated against. And, we should break our lives for the weak. This is the wheat metaphor Jesus said in today's text, and it means to give life for others, and how to serve God. This is the parable of a grain of wheat Jesus said, and it means to break life for others and how to serve God.

Believing in Jesus Christ should not just remain in the confession of faith. It has to go beyond that and be expressed in our lives as an action of love.

In today's scripture lesson, God promises to make a new covenant to the people of Israel. God says that “I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33) This is what God promised to send Jesus Christ to the earth. You may remember that when Jesus came to the earth and was baptized by John the Baptist, the heavens were opened. This means that Jesus came to this land as a peacemaker. God sent Jesus to the earth to break down all the existing conflicts, sorrows, oppression and pain that humans have.

We, humans, have the nature of wanting to be divided, not united. The people of Israel distinguished the world between Jews and Gentiles. The powerful distinguished the world between powerful and non-powerful.

Beloved, How about you? Aren't we sometimes divided into Christians and non-Christians? It is important to live according to God's word. However, if we judge and criticize others, it is a misunderstanding of why Jesus came to earth. Jesus came to earth that has been divided by races, cultures, and languages causing conflicts and divisions to make us one and unite us in Christ through the body of Christ and the blood of Christ.

It is never easy to die for others as a grain of wheat, to willingly break our lives for others, to serve our neighbors just as Jesus did. However, it is a way of salvation that we must walk on. May we all walk along the way of salvation together with Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.