

Fifth Sunday in Lent  
Sermon Text: John 12:20-33  
Date Preached: March 29, 2009

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

How many of us gave up something for Lent? The idea of giving up something for Lent is a spiritual discipline meant to draw us away from what we've given up and closer to Christ. Such spiritual discipline acknowledges that the things we have given up can become a barrier in our relationship with God, thus depending on them more than God.

Such spiritual discipline be it giving up meat on Friday, laying aside the cigarettes, or cutting out salt from one's diet may have health benefits. While it may be good for us that too is not the first benefit that draws us to practice such a spiritual discipline.

To give up something is to die to our self and practice what Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel reading. "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."

As a congregation, we recently died. We died to something that had become familiar to us. We died to using the green hymnal.

What died was more than simply the color of the book. What died was our familiarity. From my own standpoint, if you asked me where to find the hymn Amazing Grace, I could tell you that it is hymn number 448 without even looking. Likewise, if I was a little late in turning to that page, I could sing along however poorly and easily catch up.

With a new hymnal comes a new an adjustment. We died to what was familiar and have either wholeheartedly or grudgingly accepted this new hymnal. Some of us complain about a few things that have been slightly reworded.

Both the Nicene and Apostle's Creed's have been slightly reworded. Yes, maybe we have lost the ability for a while to recite them without looking. On the other hand, by following along we can be more in tune to what it is we are actually saying.

In this way we can be more conscious of those visiting our congregation. Recognizing how awkward this transition may be for us, we can use this experience to practice good hospitality.

Such hospitality opens the door then for the visitor to share our experience with Christ in worship. That is our chief task. Notice the plural pronoun. Each of us bear a joyful responsibility in making this congregation a welcoming place, and I must say from my experience and from the experiences of others who have joined our congregation, we are doing well.

Hospitality of course is just a beginning. Hospitality goes beyond the mechanics of what we do and don't do. Hospitality invites the stranger into a relationship with God. We experience God in worship. For here our relationship with God is deepened.

In worship we hear the Word of God. We hear God's desire to be with us so much that he is going to write, carve, and inscribe himself into our very hearts, as expressed by the prophet Jeremiah.

In worship we taste the Word of God as he comes to us in bread and wine, desiring such an intimate relationship that he will crawl inside of us.

In these experiences our worth as God's children is affirmed. We are so prized by God that there are no lengths to which God will not go for us; for God goes even to the extent of sending his son Jesus to lay

down his life for us. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Such glorification starts with death, that in dying God rises up the Son of Man and all who believe in him.

It is perfectly appropriate and necessary that we die to those things that prevent people from seeing Jesus. Only in death can we experience the exuberance of new life that is offered in Christ.

In death, we experience grace that comes to us in new and surprising ways. Our relationship with God is based on his abundant grace and love for us. It is this love and grace that continually invites us back, calls us in prayer, empowers us in our service so that in many and varied ways we encounter Christ.

The invitation is before us. Come and see as the Philip and Andrew did. Come and see as the Greeks made their request to see Jesus. Come and see Jesus and when you go, go knowing being able to say “I met Jesus here.”