

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking today: 'Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help, said the psalmist. Yet you, O Lord, put your very life into the hands of those princes, mortals, governors, chief priests.

Happy are those whose helps is the God of Jacob, whose help is in the Lord their God, said the psalmist. You made all there is, your knowledge is greater than we can ever know, and you set the prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, lifting the bowed down, for you love righteousness. Let us worship the servant God.'

**Hymn – All people that on earth do dwell,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Lord God, you are Monarch. No doubt, no question, no denying. And yet, a Ruler so different from what a Monarch is expected to be. Your power over us is not the result of threat or fear. Your reign is not imposed on us by the might of sword or the size of wealth. Your royal lineage is not of human design.

You rule because you are God's own Son. Your power comes from the words and deeds of your life and the hold such goodness has on us. You reign because your kingdom is worth it; and the new way of justice and mercy is what we seek for the world of your Father's creation.

Lord, you call us to submit to the vision you have for the world: to be active in co-creating and determined in spirit to build the world we read about in scripture: fair and honourable and welcoming to all.

Have mercy on us when we are slow to follow, quick to turn aside; when we are less than committed to living every day as your disciple. Have mercy on us when we are choosy about who to love and protective of what we have to the extent we are unwilling to share the good things of life with others. Have mercy on us when faith is lacking in outward activity; when passivity is all too easy.

Gracious Father, you are not quick to smite and cut us off. Instead you are forgiving and merciful in abundance. As we pray before you, honest in our inadequacies and errors, grant us the forgiveness we crave and inspire us to new living.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Readings: Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34**

<sup>31</sup>The Lord says, "The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant. <sup>33</sup>The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup>None of them will have to teach a neighbour to know the Lord, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the Lord, have spoken."

### **John 12: 20 – 33**

#### **Some Greeks Seek Jesus**

<sup>20</sup>Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. <sup>21</sup>They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. <sup>24</sup>I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. <sup>26</sup>Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honour anyone who serves me.

#### **Jesus Speaks about His Death**

<sup>27</sup>"Now my heart is troubled—and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came—so that I might go through this hour of suffering. <sup>28</sup>Father, bring glory to your name!" Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I

have brought glory to it, and I will do so again.”<sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, “An angel spoke to him!”<sup>30</sup> But Jesus said to them, “It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours.”<sup>31</sup> Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown.<sup>32</sup> When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (<sup>33</sup> In saying this he indicated the kind of death he was going to suffer.)

## **Hymn – I heard the voice of Jesus say**

### **Sermon – ‘Life’s secret’**

Cards on the table - today I am going to tell you the secret to life. You probably already know what I am going to tell you, though you may not have thought of it as the secret to life. It is something you have seen and experienced over and over. It is one of those secrets hidden in plain sight. It is also one of those secrets that can trouble the soul, so we often turn away from it or close our eyes to it.

*‘I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains.’* (John 12:24). So, there you have it. Now you know. That is the secret to life.

It is the pattern of loss and renewal that runs throughout our lives and our world. Even if you have never thought of this as the secret to life, you have lived and experienced it, sometimes by choice and other times by chance. Either way it is there.

A question. Have you ever fallen in love and committed your life to another? If so, you had to let parts of your old life go and something of your single life died so that you could be with that other person. How about parenting? If you are a parent, you know that there are sacrifices of yourself and your life to be made in order for the new life of your child to emerge and grow. We give up parts of ourselves for the other. Parents are continually letting go of their child so she or he can grow up. Have you ever been the caretaker of another? If so, you could name the parts of your life that died so that another might live with dignity, compassion, and love.

What are the costs, the losses, you paid for an education or a career? You chose certain losses and let go of some things so that other things could arise. For every choice we make, every yes, we say, there is at least one no and probably many. This same pattern is in nature. You can see it in the changing of the seasons, falling leaves and new blooms, and the setting and rising of the sun.

Think about the Biblical stories of loss and renewal. Innocence in Adam and Eve died so that consciousness might be born. Abram left his country and kindred so that he might be made a great nation, renamed Abraham, and be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Jacob lost his old identity and was wounded so that he could become a new man, Israel, with a new life. James and John left their father, boats, and nets to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of people. Jesus taught his disciples, *'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.'* (Mark 9:31).

The secret is out. It is everywhere. It is a pattern of loss and renewal, dying and rising, letting go and getting back, leaving and return. It is at the core of our baptism and it can be seen every time we share in communion together. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

I wonder, what in your life do you need to let go of today? What might you need to leave behind? What needs to die so that something new can arise?

I do not think it's a coincidence that today's Gospel reading is set in the context of the Passover feast. For, the Passover is the celebration of the Israelites' liberation from bondage in Egypt. It is about freedom and new life. It is about letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life.

There is something about this pattern that is the lens through which we see Jesus. Some Greeks come to Philip and say, *'Sir, we want to see Jesus.'* I do not know why they want to see Jesus, but I could have a good guess. Jesus turned water into wine. He cleansed the temple. He healed the son of the royal official. He healed the paralytic. He fed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He walked on water. He gave sight to the man born blind. He raised Lazarus from the dead. *'Sir, we want to see Jesus.'* That is the Jesus I want to see. Don't you?

Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks and their request. Philip and Andrew tell Jesus. And Jesus says to them, *'I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains.'* That is his response to those who want to see him; to the Greeks, to you, to me.

I want you to know that dying is about more than our physical death. Yes, it is that, but it is also more than that. We die a thousand deaths throughout our lifetime. The

loss of a loved one, a relationship, health, opportunities, a dream; all deaths we did not want or ask for. Other times we choose our losses and deaths. We give up parts of ourselves for another. We change our beliefs and values so that we can be more authentically ourselves – and sometimes there are things we need to let go of, things we cling on to that deny us the fullness of life we want and God offers: fear, anger or resentment, regret and disappointment, guilt, the need to be right, approval.

Seeing Jesus is not a spectator sport. It is a way to be followed, a truth to be embodied, a life to be lived. It is being a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bear much fruit. That is where we see him. It is the letting go, the emptying, the leaving behind, and the dying that makes space for new life to arise.

I am sure we have all probably had at least one time in our lives, that we look back on and say, “I never want to go through that again. But I wouldn’t trade that experience for anything.” What is that time for you? What happened? As difficult or painful as that experience was it bore much fruit. You were changed and your life was renewed. It was one of those times when you were the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. It was one of those times when you knew you had seen Jesus, when you experienced the holy, when you were absolutely convinced that God was present and working in your life.

How often have you had to let something, yet more likely someone, go and you spend time wanting that person back. Maybe that is the grain of wheat that needs to fall into the earth and die for all of us. That does not mean that we do not want those we miss terribly back, that we would not undo what has happened if we could. It just means that we want to trust Jesus’ promise of new life more than my wishful thinking. And sometimes that is really hard.

Letting go, however, does not mean rejection or walking away and it does not mean choosing absence over presence. Instead, letting go is what allows us to be more authentically present to ourselves and another. It makes room for new life and new ways of being present to arise. Our letting go gives God something with which to work. Why then would we continue to cling, to live as an isolated, self-enclosed, single grain wheat?

This is the soul-troubling secret to life. *“I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains.”* So, I wonder, what is the grain of wheat in

your life today that needs to fall into the earth and die? What are the things that if you lost them you are sure you would just die? Maybe those are the very places waiting to bear much fruit in your life. Maybe that is where you will see Jesus.

This secret, this pattern of loss and renewal, will be unveiled everyday throughout Holy Week. I think that is why we hear this text today, a week before Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. It is our preparation for Holy Week and where does Holy Week finish? At Easter, the empty tomb, the dawn of a new day, and the renewal of life. The single grain has become the Bread of Life.

Yet we also know that you do not plant a seed and go back in ten minutes or the next day and see a new sprout. Growth can be slow, and the fruit of new life takes time, usually longer than we want it to. Yet, even when unseen, unbelieved, or unrecognized, the power and life of God are present and at work in the depths of our life, in the dark and hidden places. That is the mystery of life.

*'I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains.'*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Hymn – Lift high the name of Jesus**

#### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Holy God, there are so many who rule in this world. Many create rules for themselves, some inherit title and position, some are elected to positions of government, some are thrust into leadership because people believe in them.

Sometimes our world is a mixed-up place where the rulers, leaders, and those with power make a right mess of things: economies falter, the world's resources are damaged, relationships between nations and peoples break down, suspicions are heightened, and barriers are erected, gaps between the rich and poor are widened, people are denied the rights to healthcare, education and work, while others prosper.

Today we pray for those who have lost loved ones, those who are ill, those who are troubled by self-doubt and anxiety, those who grieve.

We recall those who endure life under the reign of unjust leaders, those who are suppressed by authority that is over-bearing and judgemental.

We pray too for those who see the services we take for granted — education and healthcare — withheld because of gender or poverty and we pray for those discriminated against because of nationality or race.

Lord God, may your leadership be made real in the world of our time. May peace, justice and mercy rule the world. May the impending glory of resurrection and celebration in Eastertide bring the world great hope and reason to believe that the world does not have to remain as it is. In your name, and to you glory, we bring our prayer. Amen.

### **The Invitation**

This is the table of our Lord Jesus Christ who chooses you to dine with him in this place today. Choosing you, he invites you to find, at this table, strength to carry your cross. So, come, all who are hesitant and dithering. Come, you who are sure and committed. Choose Christ who has chosen you. Choose life, symbolised here in bread and wine.

The Lord Jesus Christ once said: “Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest.”

(Matthew 11: 28 – 29)

**Hymn – Jesus calls us here to meet him,**

### **The Sacrament of Holy Communion**

#### **The Story of the Lord’s Supper**

Jesus constantly laid before his friends, choices:

The choice to remain or to follow. The choice to listen or to ignore. The choice to be blind or to see. The choice to be sick or to be whole. The choice of life or of death.

His disciples chose life - they followed, they listened, they saw, they were made whole.

And even though they often faltered or dithered or forgot, Jesus didn't give up or let up - he kept on holding out forgiveness and newness of life.

And so, the night before he died, he gathered his friends around a meal, spoke to them again of the cross and invited them to remember him by choosing to share in this feast together.

He shared bread, symbol of his body, broken for the life of the world. He shared the cup, symbol of a new relationship with God.

This table bears those symbols today. Before we share, let us give thanks to God as we come before him in prayer, let us pray.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God, we thank you that you never impose yourself on us but gently, persistently invite us into relationship with you. You invite us to choose life over death, to take up our cross and follow Christ. May we choose life for the sake of the world.

God, we pray for our world in all its pain and suffering. We pray for all those who, every day, are forced to make hard choices or for whom there is no choice. Those forced from home and family by war, by oppression, by danger, by evil or natural disaster.

Show us how to restore the voices of those who are silenced along with the freedom to choose for those who find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

May your cross symbolise the way of suffering carved out in love that transforms pain and renews life. May we always be willing to bear another's burden, to lift up the suffering and to know the blessing of travelling together.

We pray for refugees, for migrants, for all seeking a place to call home. May we choose to open our hearts to make room, to share the road and to know ourselves taught by those whose learning is wrought through pain and hardship.

May we choose life for the sake of the church. God, we thank you for all those who have gone before us on the journey of faith. Those on whose shoulders we now stand. Those who surround us as we share this feast. May we always make space for others around your table, where there is love enough for all.

Give your church boldness and wisdom to proclaim the God who invites all people to choose life. May we choose life for our sake and the sake of the communities in which we live.

As we go about our everyday lives give us courage to serve and to be served.

Be with those whom we know who grieve, who have lost the joy of living. Help us to put ourselves aside and sit with them until we are ready to continue the journey together with you.

So, choosing God, as we come to this table today, may our choice witness to the hope we have in you. Send you Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and of wine that they may become life for all. Feed us here with strength to take up our cross and follow you every day. Amen.

### **Breaking & Sharing Bread & Wine**

We now do this in obedience to Christ's example and appointment. Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, he blessed it, he broke it and he shared it. We do this to remember him.

After supper, Jesus took the cup, the symbol of a new start with God. Sharing it, he said: "Do this to remember me."

We meet Jesus here and celebrate the generosity of God. By these we remember Christ who took up the cross and offered life to us.

### **In giving the bread, the minister says...**

The bread is the body of Christ broken for you and for all humankind. Together we take, eat and remember in love.

### **In giving the cup, the minister says...**

Before us is the cup of salvation, Christ's blood shed that we might know a new relationship with God. Together we drink this to remember the promise.

### **Bread and Wine are Shared.**

### **The Peace**

The peace of the Father of joy; the peace of the Christ of hope; the peace of the Spirit of grace, may the Lord's peace be with you all. Amen.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion**

God who has fed us and confronted us again with our oneness with all the world, strengthen us to take up our cross and follow you, gathering up along the way all those who falter and fall, all those who dither, those who are blind or sick and want to be whole. We who have choices, every day may we choose life with you, life in all its fullness for the sake of the world and the kingdom of God. Amen.

**Hymn – And can it be,**

### **Benediction**

In the distance, the sound of hammer on nail, the clamour of the crowds, the gathering of judgement, and walking from here to there, from Praetorium to Golgotha, a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

We go today remembering what is to come. May the blessing of the Creative One, the Servant Ruler, the Empowering Companion, be with you and all who you love this day and forevermore. Amen.

**Closing Song – The Blessing (Canada)**