Accept the yoke of obedience, and commit to do God's perfect will.

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Lent 5 B – Jrm 31 31-34, Ps 119 9-16, Heb5 5-14, John 12 20-33

Today's gospel reading takes us a little bit out of sequence. Just before today's scene there was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we'll mark next Sunday. That scene ended with some exasperated Pharisees grumbling to each other: [19] *…"You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"*

They didn't know how truly they spoke, says John. In the very next verse – the one we began with today – we're told that '*…among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.*[21] *They came to Philip … and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*' These Greek Jews don't come directly to Jesus, they go to Philip. And Philip doesn't go straight to Jesus either. He goes to Andrew.

Is this a chain of access through social secretaries; the birth of Church bureaucracy? No, there's more to it than that. Philip goes to Andrew with the foreigners' request to see Jesus. What's so special about Andrew? In John's gospel, Andrew's the first-named disciple of Jesus. [John 1.40] He's one of those two disciples of John the Baptist who were first to follow Jesus. He was also the first disciple to recognise Jesus' true identity. In Jn 1.41, we see him find his brother, Simon Peter, and tell him, *"We have found the Messiah."* Going back to Andrew, the gospel writer has taken us back to the beginning; to where Jesus was first recognised for who he was. Why?

John the evangelist is saying that with the request of foreigners to see Jesus, we're at a new beginning in our understanding of who Jesus is; we're at a turning point in the Gospel. By doing this, John helps us see what Jesus' enigmatic answer might mean. [23] … *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

Earlier, Jesus puzzled us by telling his mother – *my hour has not yet come.* 2.4 –at the wedding at Cana But today, he says his hour *has* come. And it has something to do with foreigners seeking him. Now Jesus' mission broadens as he starts to become available to the wider world. But just how he's going to be glorified is going to challenge us all. [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.*

Jesus is telling his friends that it's soon time for him to die. It must have bewildered them. Buoyed by the great triumph of the Palm Sunday procession, the disciples would have been filled with hopeful expectation. No-one would stand in their teacher's way now! But suddenly they're confronted by some of Jesus' most solemn pronouncements. And they're not just pronouncements about Jesus.

There's the grain of wheat saying, but what Jesus says next calls his followers to join in his path to passion and death too. [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.* Following Jesus means turning from our priorities to his; choosing the way of Jesus over the way of many instinctive choices we might make. We are disciples, students, followers of Jesus. In fact, together, we *are* him. He will die; he will give up everything – to bring life to the lost. And we who follow him need to be prepared for the same.

The call to be a disciple of Jesus is utterly uncompromising; but we can *miss* seeing that. *We* look back at all this through the great triumph of Easter. Easter filters our vision; it makes the passion and death of Jesus somehow less terrible for us; less demanding of us. But we can't let that happen. We can't pretend *that* any more than we can pretend that the suffering and evil of our time makes no call on us.

Greeks to Philip to Andrew to Jesus, John took us back to the beginning to alert us to a new beginning. That's what we do each year as a Church at Holy Week and Easter. We go back to our beginning; to our sharing in the Cross of Christ at our baptism, where the power of evil to own us was broken, and we committed ourselves to let Christ's goodness to work new life through us. That's our new beginning, and we must always return to it. We heard Jeremiah describe it as a new covenant.

Let's consider all this in words taken from the Church of South India's covenant service. *Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some suit our natural inclinations and material interests; others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given us in Christ, who strengthens us. Therefore let us make this covenant with God our own, trusting in the eternal promises and relying on divine grace. Let us pray: Lord God, in baptism, you brought us into union with Christ who fulfils your gracious covenant; and in bread and wine we receive the fruit of his obedience. So with joy we take upon ourselves the yoke of obedience, and commit ourselves to seek and do your perfect will. … I am no longer my own, but yours …*

I remind myself that this is the prayer of people who, when they pray the Lord's Prayer, literally ask only their bread for this day. Are we brave enough to make such a prayer our own? Amen