

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
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Marg McGugan

Imperishable Seed (Mark 10: 35-45 and I Peter 1 : 14-16, 18-25)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord. Our rock and redeemer.

Have you ever wondered how a single apple can dangle precariously from a twig after the winter storms have wrecked havoc causing branches to fall? But there it dangles, wrinkled and dried waiting for something to release it from its perch. For as long as it remains suspended, it remains dead. The seeds are trapped within its dormant state until a strong northwesterly wind drops it onto the ground to decompose in the soil. With sun and rain the seeds transform from death to new life,

New growth.

New change.

Life tells us this. Jesus tells us this. The winter storm of Jesus' life is fast approaching, waiting to play havoc on his human life.

And that is where we are in our scripture lesson, the winter storm is approaching, and the humans are resisting his death. They don't understand why he talks about his death when he has so much life to give. He is in the prime of his life.

Many times, he has shown the Palestinian world his power in miracles and the disciples have no doubt that his power will overthrow the Roman Empire.

Mark, the author of our gospel reading, brings us into a direct conversation between James, John and Jesus. It seems foolhardy that they would ask Jesus to do something for them, immediately after being told for the third time, of his impending death and resurrection.

Instead, 2 of the 12 ask a favour from Jesus. *'Can we have glory when you ride into Jerusalem by sitting on your right and left!'*

Do they really understand what Jesus has been talking about?

Do they really understand that this man is the seed of David, the long-awaited Messiah?

The tyrants will not control him nor human rulers lord over him.

And as soon as 1 or 2 disciples want favouritism, then the rest of the brood is looking for the same treatment.

It is human nature to want the same treatment, to be equal amongst their peers. Otherwise things are perceived unfair.

But life is not always fair. Bad things happen, and death and destruction happen as the northwesterly winds play havoc on our lives.

It was a small, out of the way town situated in the northeastern part of Newfoundland. The islanders had woken up to what looked like a normal day. But God had another plan.

It was September 11th, and the world had woken to destruction, havoc and terrorism, leaving people scrambling for some sort of sense or reason as to why such a thing could possibly happen so close to home.

And in this small town located, hundreds of kilometers away, the towns people, had no chance to ask questions.

International airplanes were dropping from the skies and were sitting on their airport's tarmac. Close to 6700 civilians and some military personal including 18 animals landed and remained in the planes for hours.

I would expect, everyone was confused and frightened.

Most people would be expecting to fly home or catch a connecting flight somewhere in the United States. But all airspace near or over the United States was closed.

The townspeople looked across the tarmac filled to capacity with planes from Israel, Austria, Spain, Poland, France, the Philippines, Iran, Italy, England, Germany, Thailand, Belgium, Ukraine, Africa, Hungary, Uganda, Senegal, Russia, United Arab Emirates and just about every state in the USA.

Most of these people had probably never heard of Gander and probably would not pick it as a vacation destination. But by an act of terrorism, they were at the mercy of these islanders who did not fail their mission.

We want to ask something of you, God.

We want to know where you were that day?

You could have done something to prevent the horror but instead you remained silent.

You could have stopped those planes from hitting the Twin Towers; from hitting the pentagon. You watched as passengers died after diverting a plane to hit a field in Pennsylvania.

You could have shifted the winds to the right or left throwing their flight pattern off. You could have prevented the death of innocent people.

Symbolically, the world became perishable seed as human life was snuffed out. Even today current horrors of the world hit the headlines of leading newspapers and still the same questions are asked.

We sound like James and John who ask Jesus for a favour.

'We want you to do something for us that we ask of you.'

They seem to do and say many of the same things that we would do and say.

They wanted to sit on the left and right of Jesus.

They wanted a pre-assigned seat in the business class because Jesus' authority showed much promise to a royal rule and they wanted to capitalize on it.

They wanted to share in the glory of Jesus; not really understanding the intense pain and suffering that Jesus would endure.

John, James and Peter went with Jesus up the mountain on Transfiguration Day, they saw the glory that surrounded Jesus dressed in his dazzling white clothing. They saw Elijah and Moses who suddenly appeared before their eyes and in a cloud, disappeared.

The disciples observed, or should I say, partially observed, when they were not sleeping-- Jesus' agony in Gethsemane.

They had no idea what they were asking of Jesus.

The same nature of human power that we saw on September 11th is similar to the kind of human power that crushed Jesus in a political spectacle of his trial and crucifixion. Jesus was put to death—an innocent man much misunderstood and feared.

The seed that Jesus was planting in his ministry, was imperishable seed. Seed that is not crushed by human power or human achievements or human tyranny.

Reading about Jesus' disciples can be an act of great humility because, as is oftentimes the case, we see ourselves in them.

When we ask God where he was that day, or for that matter, any day that sees terror or violence or injustice are we not assuming that God thinks like us?

Are we not stepping into God's authority by pushing our opinions onto him by telling him how we would run the world?

How much better everything would be if we sat to the right and left of his reign?

Can we drink from Jesus' cup? Can we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Do we know what we are asking? Were we there when the heavens tore opened and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove on him. When the thunderous voice charged the ordinance --- 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (Mark 1: 10-11).

Were we there when Jesus said, 'forgive them: for they do not know what they are doing.'

We wonder how hope will flourish when the world looks so pitiful and hopeless, like a shrivelled apple hanging dead on a tree branch.

All it takes is a strong wind to pluck that apple from its perch and expose the seeds to the rain and soil that God provides. All it takes is the human heart to let go of its ignorance of neighbour and behold the seed of holiness.

Jesus died, but we also understand by faith that he broke open the tomb that confined him. His resurrection changed the world for all Christians but especially for the early Christians who were persecuted by their family and neighbours and city officials because they were worshipping Jesus Christ who redeemed them to a new life.

They were redeemed from futile ways, inherited from their ancestors not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

Through Christ, we have come to trust God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory so that our faith and our hope are set on God.

That is the holy word of God.

The imperishable seed.

That September day at Gander, changed many lives. The towns people of Gander were busy trucking in food and blankets. The down-east hospitality grew with a different vengeance. The townspeople opened their homes, opened their shelters, opened their churches, opened their shops, opened their hearts.

A small town picked up the pieces it was handed and handed out blessings.

The outpouring of kindness in the town only multiplied over the next five days. Gander residents took passengers sightseeing, moose hunting, berry picking and barbecuing. They entertained with music, stopped anyone walking down the street in case they wanted a ride and brought strangers into their homes for showers or even as guests for a few nights. They refused to accept money, though the stranded passengers later donated thousands of dollars to the town.

The nations wept together. The nations prayed together.

But one small town was eating at the banquet table with guests from around the world. We never know when the cup will come to us. We will never know when God will suddenly call us, but we should remember from I Peter that 'all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass, but the word of the Lord endures forever.'

We just need to remember that the Word of God breaks forth from our hearts with every gracious and good act we are asked to do.

How can evil overcome imperishable seed?

Amen.