

**John 12: 20 – 33 Unless a seed ....**  
Newtonbrook United Church March 29, 2009  
(Another Lenten drama in two parts)



(Philip enters the chancel)

Good morning – my name is Philip. My home is in Bethsaida in Galilee. I am also one of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth – a teacher; a prophet; a man who we have been following for the past three years as he traveled around Galilee. We are on our way to Jerusalem to worship in the temple at the time of Passover.

This morning I want to share a story about what has happened – but first I want to give some background to the story.

We have been “on the road” visiting all manner of places until we arrived in Caesarea Philippi. Ever since then we have been on a slow but sure march towards Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Caesarea Philippi is in the far north – for you geographers – and it is a city where many of our people have begun to live, not with Jewish values, but according to the values and way of life of the Greeks.<sup>2</sup> We are moving towards Jerusalem, and Passover.

Six days before Passover we stopped in Bethany, at the home of Mary, and Martha and Lazarus<sup>3</sup>. You might remember Lazarus. He was the one who Jesus raised from the dead. When they heard about this, the religious authorities all gathered around to see Jesus – and especially to see Lazarus. I hear that there was a plot to kill Lazarus since it was because of him that so many people are becoming followers of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Some Greek people came up to me and asked to see Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, Page 34

<sup>2</sup> Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, page 241

<sup>3</sup> John 12:1,2

<sup>4</sup> John 12:10

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I went to Andrew, and we both went to talk to Jesus. (*I tell you this to show that, even among disciples, there is a hierarchy and a way to do things through proper channels.*)

Jesus said a strange thing to us – you may know that he often said some pretty strange things that do not conform to the ways of the world. He was, I have to put in the picture, an authentic non-conformist! It seemed like a paradox that biblical people should be on the margins of society.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said; “***unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit***.”<sup>6</sup>

(Philip leaves and Jesus enters.)

Philip is a good man. He thinks that he doesn't understand, but he will when he thinks about it. ***Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.***

It is like this sheaf of wheat that I have in my hand. Each stalk came from one seed. Each stalk has a head that contains many seeds. Each of my disciples is like a seed that can bear much fruit by following the way of God.

Following the Way of God means that the future is brighter and more abundant than today. Our best days are ahead of us. I have been trying to convince my disciples that I came that they might have life more abundantly<sup>7</sup>; that's my purpose – to show that abundant life is available to everyone. God loves this world and God offers us the option of living with a radically different value system than that of the Empire.<sup>8</sup>

But there is a catch.

Just look at these seeds. They're beautiful. Within each one is a whole plant that is possible – with another head of seeds. We cannot have that lush new plant, that verdant green wheat without putting these seeds into the ground.

What I am saying is that;

- IF we want transformation to happen,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Gomes, the Scandalous gospel of Jesus, page 47

<sup>6</sup> John 12:24

<sup>7</sup> John 10:10

<sup>8</sup> Brian McLaren, The secret Message of Jesus, page 133

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- IF we are committed to a new way of abundant life for ourselves and others,

we will have to take what we have, bury it, and hope that it germinates, grows and thrives. What we have, we must invest in the future. We will need to open our hearts. The future will be different from what we have in the present; transformation, through God's grace, will happen. ABUNDANCE is possible!

Let me tell you about how this works.

In this world of abundance, death is not a concern. Do these seeds worry about death? No! They will only die if they are preserved and do not fall to the ground. Life is for the living – and the giving! The Kingdom of God is among us and our purpose here is to be like seeds that share the gift of life – especially with those who are poor, or ill, or who have challenges in life.

The seed of the kingdom of God is among us in tender hearts, in those who weep with those who are suffering; in those who laugh with those who are joyful! All we have to do is to open our hearts to both the JOY, and the pain, of living.

***Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth ....*** I have disciples who show that the Kingdom is among us by practicing GENEROSITY, especially towards the poor. They may be widows sharing their few coins; boys who share bread and fishes; or a GENEROUS farmer who gave all his workers a full days pay, no matter how many hours they worked. Try any of these in a world made small by Caesar's way of economic thinking!

***Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth ....*** Of course, there are those who insist on the status quo – people have, since before the days of Moses, attempted to find meaning in life through additional wealth. Out in Galilee I spoke with an affluent young man who wanted to follow the way of God. I simply asked him to sell his possessions. He went away with a sad look on his face. He wanted to have both his grain, and transformation, at the same time.

***Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth ...*** One of the most powerful transformations that my disciples can make is to realize that when I speak about the Kingdom of God I am talking about a promised **time**, and NOT a promised **land**. The time is now<sup>9</sup>; the time is the future. Let everyone open their hearts and make this world the world that we pray for – the kingdom of God here on earth, as it is in heaven.

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<sup>9</sup> Brian McLaren, The Secret Message of Jesus, page 14

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- We are here to try what hasn't been tried.
- Our best days are ahead of us.
- Tomorrow will be better than yesterday!

***Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.***

**Hymn # 79 in More Voices – Open Our Hearts**

