

Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent, which means that our Lenten journey is now moving into Holy Week. The Lenten season is one of the most significant and challenging periods of the Christian calendar. That is why Lent is often referred to as a journey. The journey is about the trials of living as Jesus' disciples and reflecting on our discipleship. Today Jesus informs us that a renewed life must go through transformation, just as a seed that falls to the ground must die in order to bear fruit. This is a message of radical change, a commitment to the gospel Jesus proclaimed that somehow reveals his dying and rising again in how we love and serve our neighbour. It is a call to discipleship that replaces *death* with *life!*

I had the opportunity to attend the stations of the Cross that was held here a few weeks ago and hosted by the Zion Women's Group. It brought back memories of my returning to church and where my faith journey began about twenty-three years ago when I returned to an active church life. Much like the two Greeks in our gospel message today, I was purposefully looking to learn more about Jesus and my faith traditions.

The church I was attending put on an elaborate "Stations of the Cross" presentation during Holy Week. The congregation transformed their sanctuary into the streets of Jerusalem. As we entered the sanctuary it was like being transported back to the time of Jesus. The space was filled with the sounds of the streets, and the crowds gathering along the sides of the road as Jesus was forced to carry his own cross to Calvary while Roman soldiers were taunting him. We weaved our way through streets of Jerusalem and as we reached each station of the cross, we were able to sit down. There we were presented with a brief description of the scene and a prayer we could meditate with. It

was an experience that we were able to take in with all of our senses.

They had incense burning somewhere; there were people dressed in period costume bustling about, people shouting to each other, street vendors trying to get our attention to buy their fruit and vegetables. The shouting of the Roman soldiers tormenting and ridiculing Jesus, and the sound of the cross being dragged by Jesus along the rough streets were piped in through the sound system. We were truly transported in space and time.

Walking the Stations of the Cross, experiencing something in real time, left an indelible impression on me. Approaching the station of the crucifixion, we heard the sounds of women crying and lamenting, the smell of burning incense, all made the scene a sensory and visual experience. As I got closer, I saw the wooden cross; there was a black cloth draped over it to symbolize the crucified Jesus. I stood there taking in the sounds, the smell of smoke, and being filled with a sense of standing there with Jesus and understanding his pain, I read the prayer, and such a feeling came over me that I had to sit down.

I don't think I heard a voice, or a crack of thunder as those in the crowd of today's Gospel, but I do know something made me realize that whatever was troubling me in my journey of faith, I could leave it here at the cross, and that Jesus had lifted my burdens from me.

Today's Gospel tells us of the two Greeks who had come to Jerusalem with a desire to meet with Jesus, not just to see him but to meet him in order to better understand him and question if

there was anything in his proclamation for them; for Gentiles and Greeks were not named God's chosen people before Jesus.

Jesus responds with these words:

“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. 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.” This is Jesus' answer to all who would “see” him; all who are drawn to him by the power of his proclamation; all who question their chosen-ness; all who hear the call to discipleship...and wonder.

Like Peter, there is a temptation for us to resist Jesus' extreme call to discipleship; to want to skip over the significance of his suffering and death and get to resurrection. So it is no coincidence that so many of the Sundays in Lent point us towards Holy Week and remind us that, as those who would “see” Jesus, as those who would follow Jesus, our resistance to the radical call of the gospel must die for there to be transformation and new life. I knew, once I heard Jesus' call as I walked the Stations of the Cross twenty-three years ago that there would be a cost to my discipleship, but, I knew, “I could leave my troubles, my misgivings, my uncertainty with Jesus; that my burdens were lifted.”

At the time I never imagined that answering Jesus' call would happen ten years later and to include attending seminary, spending long periods away from my family, and changing the whole direction of my life. Many of these things could be likened to the grain of wheat dying and falling into the earth.

But already, there has been new life and deep blessing, as I have begun to understand more fully how God's love in Jesus Christ embraces the deep needs of the world; and how ministry and discipleship, and love and serving our neighbour draws us close to Jesus and his love. My story is really the story of all who answer Jesus' call to follow him. Discipleship is the call and, as we hear in today's Gospel about even Greeks being welcomed by Jesus, the call is for everyone. The call to discipleship doesn't usually lead to studying for the ministry of word and sacrament, but, as I discovered, it could! Jesus calls us to discipleship each in our own way. As we walk with him, we also follow him. Amen.