

Title: To be or not to be
John 12:20-43

In today's Gospel story Jesus' public ministry was coming to a close. A variety of things were unfolding. Jerusalem was celebrating Passover. Jesus had just entered into Jerusalem, riding a donkey his path strewn with Palm fronds... Shouts and praises of the huge crowds rang through the air... Hosanna! Hosanna! which means "Save us!" The crowd was filled with people who had differing opinions of Jesus, but the crowd, nonetheless, was ready to proclaim Him king. A group of God-fearing Gentiles (Greeks) are there too. They have come to worship at the feast. But they are more than just curious visitors. They are seeking the truth. They approach Philip, one of the disciples of Jesus with an appeal to "see" Jesus. Having heard and observed, they were attracted or drawn to Him they wanted to believe in Him, they wanted to "know" Him. In response to their request Jesus returns with some cryptical remarks. "Whoever loves his life loses it" "Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it."

It sounds a lot like the words of Prince Hamlet of Denmark, a character from Shakespeare's play "Hamlet" "*To be, or not to be*" For Hamlet, lots of very bad things were happening in his life, a life which was slowly spinning out of control. He was trying to decide "If it was really worth all the struggles that life brought." To be or not to be, to continue to exist or to stop his existence, via suicide. Which was better? King Solomon, in the Bible who wrote the words in Ecclesiastes... also struggled with the same paradox.... There is no purpose to life. All is Meaningless! All is Vanity. So, Hamlet contemplated the universal solution to a meaningless life... suicide. Because life was meaningless. Because there was no purpose to life. Why continue living? Why continue enduring the suffering? Through suicide. maybe he could reach peace. By ending his life, he would no longer be troubled by the meaningless problems of this world. That was the attraction of suicide. That was the temptation. However, in the play, Hamlet chooses not to do it, not to commit suicide. HE chooses not to do it, because he realized something. He realized that Death... might... not... be... the... end. In Hamlet's words *the fear of something after death, makes us accept the suffering we have rather than choose the unknown*. He concluded that because death might not be the end, the fear of what happens afterward keeps us from taking our own life.

That was very wise of him. For the Bible tells us clearly that death is not the end. That which comes afterwards is something for concern. For some, what

happens after is a joy for some, but for others, eternal suffering. Death was not the solution to a meaningless life. At least, not in the way he thought of death. You see, physical death is not the only kind of death there is. The Bible sees death in a totally different way. When the Bible speaks of death it means “separation.” Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. However, it also speaks of Spiritual death. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God, separation from the one who is the source of all life. In fact, physical death is a result of spiritual death. In fact, all the problems of this world are a result of spiritual death... separation from God.

But the good news is that death does not have the final word. God has offered to us, a new relationship, a reconnection with the source of life, through faith in Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, it will be through death, that God produces renewal. Jesus says “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Jesus says that death is not the end. In fact, for the Christian, because of Jesus, death will be a time of re-birth. That is the paradox. The person who holds onto this world.... The person who gains his security in the things of this world will eventually die with nothing. But the person who lets go of the things of this world, who “dies” to this world, will be free from the trap of this world. The person who instead puts his trust in Jesus for everything will have eternal life.

There are three ways in which death is a time for renewal. First, Jesus speaks of “new life,” “new life” springing from the death of the “old life.” *The ways of the world are our “seed” life.* So long as a kernel of wheat remains a seed, if it refuses to grow out of its “seed” life and mature it will never grow into a plant, it will never bear fruit. But if it is willing to die to its “seed” life, it will grow and produce even more than it could as a seed. “The ways of the world is the seed life.” We are born into the life of this world, a world which worships money, a world which worships fame & fortune a world which worships power. It is a life which ultimately is temporal. It disappears in time. Nothing which it gains, is permanent. It is the life, which the preacher Ecclesiastes called Meaningless and “Vanity” The man who is unwilling to die to this life of the world will never bear spiritual fruit. will never live a life which God meant for us when he created the perfect Garden of Eden. It will be only by dying to the things of this world will a person be able to focus upon eternal things, upon Jesus Christ. Only by dying to this world will a person be able to grow up spiritually to be able to do things which please

God. As Jesus said “**seek first** his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (worldly supplies) will be given to you as well. That is the first way that renewal comes through death. Death to the old life.

Now for the second way which death brings renewal. Up until the time of Jesus it was thought that salvation was won by our own efforts. “You want to be righteous?” “Just be perfect in following the Law the Ten Commandments.” But there was a problem with that. The problem was that, this was no answer for those who failed to follow the law. This was no answer for those who were willing to honestly look into their own hearts, for those who were willing to admit that the human heart was full of sin. And so, a second death was necessary for renewal. It was the death of Jesus who would bring renewal. We use the analogy of the planted seed again... only this time Jesus is the planted seed. The disciples had been told by Jesus many times during their travels that he was going to die. Like the seed, Jesus had to die and be buried. And in doing so, the results of his sacrifice would bear fruit a thousandfold. This was his plan. This world was a sinful world. The wages of sin was death. Therefore all men were doomed to die... to suffer for their sins. However, a sinless man stepped forth, a man who was not under the curse of death. That man was allowed to endure death in our place. He who did not deserve death, took our death upon himself. That person was Jesus. That was his plan. That is why he had to die. *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* When Jesus died on the cross, our salvation was bought. When we look to Jesus, when we put our faith in Jesus we are born again. Jesus is the seed which is planted. We are the seeds which grow from his death. So, the first seed death which brought renewal was death to the old life. The second seed death which brought renewal was Jesus death to pay for our sins.

Now there is a third and final seed death which brings renewal. There is a third and final seed “planting” which brings an eternal crop. The seed, now, is the Gospel. The seed is the Gospel which we personally have received which brings US eternal life. The third seed is faith. We who have received the seed have eternal life. We who have received Christ within us, through faith are children of God. But this seed which has been planted in us, must produce a crop. God calls us to produce fruit in abundance. *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* If the message of the Gospel remains only a personal message to us. if the message of the Gospel

comes only to US but never goes out, then it remains only a single seed. Our personal seed, must produce many other seeds. Our personal message of the Gospel, our faith, must give way to evangelism. Our personal comfort in the Gospel must be offered to everyone out there. The personal Gospel message given to us, must bear fruit a thousandfold. When our focus upon God, moves out from our own needs our own experience with God, and moves out to the needs of our community, the spiritual salvation of our neighbors, then the Gospel seed within us will bear fruit a thousandfold. This is the mission God is calling us, here at Immanuel First. God is calling us to share his love comfort and hope, with all. In this way, the wonderful seed of salvation which God has planted in us will multiply.

In summary Death is not an end. Even Shakespeare knew that. However, because death is not the end, he feared the unknown which came afterward. That is the state of the people of this world, who do not know Christ. They fear death. They know that death is not the end. and like Hamlet they live in fear of the unknown. They so very desperately need to know that through Christ, there is nothing to fear. They need the seed of the Gospel planted in them. God is calling us, God is calling you, to take the seed of the Gospel and plant it in someone else. May you go out and bear fruit a thousandfold, Amen