

John 12:20-36

" Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. 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. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them."

Sermon: Sisyphus Meet Gynaephora Groenlandica

It was sophomore year in college when our class was instructed to read *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus. Poor Sisyphus, condemned to roll a stone up a steep and difficult hill only to release it at the top and see it roll back down - and then to do it again and again and again - up and down, up and down, relentless, never ending, fruitless labor. I think we were supposed to understand it as a metaphor for the existential meaninglessness of life.

But to tell you the truth, at that point it was a lesson I was not ready to learn. I just wanted the down of that class to end so we could get down to the boathouse and out on the river for the up of crew practice - I wanted the weekend to come so we could have two days off and maybe a party on Saturday night. It seemed to me then that life was full of adventure and excitement and wasn't that what meaning meant?

Now, looking back, I think maybe the *Myth of Sisyphus* was a metaphor for the thankless task of teaching philosophy to college sophomores - teach a class, give a test, teach a class, give a test, teach a class, give a test, give a grade. I doubt there was much evidence that the professor's relentless never ending labors produced many philosophers. I wonder how many of us left that class any more insightful than we entered it.

And yet the *Myth of Sisyphus* came back to mind when we were watching a show on the Discovery channel the other night called *Frozen Planet* which

focused on *Gynaephora Groenlandica*, more commonly called the Arctic Woolly Bear Caterpillar. This creature spends 14 years as a caterpillar - and during those 14 years is frozen solid down to temperature of 60 below 0 for ten of the twelve months of each of those 14 years. One month of every year they eat and the following month they rest and prepare for the big freeze that's coming. Only after 14 years of this eat, rest, freeze cycle do they gather the energy to do what Caterpillars do - turn into moths so they can lay eggs and give birth to the next generation of caterpillar.

My mind went to a conversation between Mrs. Woolly Bear and Mr. Sisyphus - Mrs. Woolly Bear might say - hey Sisyphus - stop the whining - you think your life is so bad - up and down the hill, up and down the hill - at least you're not frozen solid ten months out of every year. There must be the occasional diversion going up the hill - a bird that sings, a cloud that rolls by, a ticket to the final four! Anytime you want to make a trade, just call me - as if I could get cell service in the arctic.

The second conversation I imagined in my head was between me and my philosophy teacher. I would have told him that the seeds he sowed in that class in the Spring of 1965 finally sprouted. After all those years of dormancy, I actually used the myth of Sisyphus as a point of reference - I guess in spite of myself I learned something.

At this point, when working on this sermon, I was interrupted - we were on Long Island helping our daughter move to her new home on Shelter Island and I was needed to hold our new granddaughter so that some serious packing could get done. You don't have much time, or much inclination, to ponder the meaning of life when you are holding a ten day old baby - the weight of it all is right there in your arms.

However much the arctic woolly bear caterpillar might find contentment in hanging on long enough to become a moth, when Camus wrote the Myth of Sisyphus he was probably right that the deeper meaning we seek from life is not inherent in the biological cycle of birth, consumption, reproduction, death - although there are times when that comes pretty close. But it is both our blessing and our curse that something in our souls hungers and thirsts for more. It's a blessing when we find the path to the nourishment for this hunger, but it's a curse because we are so creative at finding and pursuing paths which lead us not towards fullness of life but towards destruction.

Existentialists like Camus, if I remember rightly, felt that this deeper meaning was something each of us was responsible to create for ourselves. Christians, on the other hand, would think of this in terms of accepting Jesus as the path to a deeper communion with God that brings peace. But Camus and Christians Both would agree that we have to make choices and at some point take a leap of faith and give ourselves fully to our choices. There is risk involved in the decision to live a meaningful life.

Now, if all this is true of living a meaningful life, how many more issues are raised if we consider dying a meaningful death? I believe

that is the question Jesus addresses with his disciples in the Gospel lesson for this morning.

I have always been struck by the words of Jesus in this morning's lesson - "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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.

How does the death of Jesus bear much fruit? One of the things we always say about Jesus death is that it was for the sake of others - It's in the ancient Nicene Creed of the church

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

How was the death for our sake, what did it accomplish? The Apostle Paul - working again with the image of the seed - proclaims the promise of resurrection:

" But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... Just as we have borne the image of Adam, the man of dust, we will also bear the image of Jesus, the man of heaven. ...When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

We are not just about our labor, we are not just about our children or even our grandchildren. God has put in our hearts a hunger and thirst for spiritual life, life that is not lived for its own sake, life that is not destroyed in death but rises up again in power. We nourish this life when we nourish the seeds of the Gospel, the words of Jesus, the contemplation of his life, passion, death and resurrection, works of mercy done in his name for the sake of others.

Now we come to the last days of Lent and Holy Week is right on the horizon. Make a choice to enter into this spiritual season with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Be ready to make that leap of faith - I tell you: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.