

“Exercise Your Courage”

Psalm 51:1-12, John 12:20-33

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Our New Testament reading describes Jesus predicting his death. In this story, some gentile people came to the disciples and asked them if they would see Jesus. Jesus shared this parable with them. It is a story about seeds and life. Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only one seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” The one obvious thing is that there will be no crop without the process of planting seeds in the earth. In order to bear much fruit in the future, seeds must be thrown to the ground first and constantly be fed by the fertile soil and water, then it starts sprouting. What does it mean that a grain of wheat ‘falls’ to the ground and ‘dies’, not remaining as a single grain? It is a metaphor of Jesus’ sacrificial act of love to save us by his death on the cross.

Some of us wonder why God had to sacrifice His only son on the cross. Why would Jesus choose to die in order to save us? This is a very difficult theological question. I am not intending to give you the right answer this morning. Instead, I suggest us to see Jesus’ sacrificial act of death with a different perspective: God’s courage. God took courage sacrificing his only son. God took a big risk because people may not turn back to God. Jesus also could have avoided the cross, but he chose to die for us on the cross. Why would he be so willing? What would God and Jesus challenge us to learn from this courageous act of love?

Let us explore the parable further. Spring has come! It is a season of reviving nature and renewing lives. The warm sunshine and fertile earth are helping flowers to bud, plants to grow and seeds to sprout. Spring is an amazing time! Everything in nature looks fresh, vibrant and ready for a new start. My wife planted various kinds of seeds in our backyard a month ago. I labored to plough the ground so that she was easily able to plant the seeds. A couple of weeks ago, I saw some greenish things rising from the ground. I took a picture of this last Friday. I want to share this picture with you. Unfortunately, my wife doesn’t remember the name of this plant. It may be either radish, carrot or something edible in the near future. Time will finally tell us. When she planted those seeds, there were simply solid seeds. At first, the seeds were covered by the husks, which look too hard and strong to break. It makes me wonder how it could lead them to sprout a new life. What I was told was that once the seeds are planted in the ground, the power of life will push the seed to sprout. It will

break open in the fertile soil while the husk is being broken and removed. Little by little and at some point, the sprout will completely come out, leaving the husk behind. That's how a new life begins. The core of life is hidden beneath the husk. The role of the husk is to protect and keep the seed safe until it can come to life.

I challenge us to twist the image of the husk and go deeper to discover more spiritual meanings focusing on the process of birth and new life. Imagine that you have a seed in your hands: When a seed falls to the ground, it stays a while deep in the soil, and finally, with the sun, fertile soil and water, a sprout breaks forth through the husk. In this process, the husk will be broken and cast aside when new life begins. Ironically, the sprout must break the husk and leave it behind in order to bring a brand new life to the earth. In this process, falling and dying are very important steps. The husk can be understood as a metaphor of death or something that we need to be 'letting go of', 'leaving behind' or 'break'. That requires us of our courage. And choosing God is an act of courage. In other words, we should practice our courage to be like Jesus. It is not easy, but the truth is that, without breaking the husk, there is no life. When Jesus shared this parable with the disciples and Gentiles, Jesus knew that we would need to be more like seeds in order to be his followers. If we dare to leave our husk behind in our lives, what would **life** be?

My question for you is what will be your 'husk' that you must break through for a new life in this season of Lent? What can you do in order to die and start the process of beginning? I urge you to take the time to consider your 'husk'. Is it broken and removed so that new life will begin in you? It could be our arrogance that we trust only ourselves. We say that we believe in God, but most of the time, we do not yield our will to God's. We try to take care of life's challenges ourselves. We do not have much patience to listen to others. We are much too self-centered in our thoughts and actions. We need to check our relationships not only with God, but also with friends and people that we know. On the contrary, if we underestimate ourselves and think that we are unworthy of God's grace, it is another husk that we need to break through. God does not want us to be condemned and to worry about self-doubting ourselves. In God's eyes, we are his precious children. Jesus died on the cross, first of all, because God loved us. Secondly, it reminds us that we should trust our God and acknowledge that God is our "guide". The cross that Jesus took was the husk that we have to deal with. The life that he sacrificed at the crucifixion was our arrogance, self-pride and our negative image of ourselves.

How does this story affect your life? What do you need to break open your husk? Do you want to make everything perfect in your life's plan? You might

have a myth or fantasy that you should be perfect, even that you want to hear compliments that you are perfect!!! I am sorry to say this, but we must accept that we are not perfect. We can make mistakes, have faults and hurt others, whether we mean it or not. Or sometimes we fall into the trap that we are not worthy in front of God. We have a fear that we are not good enough, but God accepts us as we are. As a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to bear many seeds, we must keep practicing our courage of ‘dying’ every day. So we leave the husk behind, and transformed, little by little, into something new and beautiful with God’s guidance, abiding love and with our ears and hearts open to listen. While we have been in the journey of Lent, I hope that we all learn this courage from Jesus Christ. Amen.