

John 12:20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

It's that time of year. **Seeds.** Seeds are everywhere. They are for sale in grocery stores, convenience stores, nurseries of course. The editor of the garden section in the newspaper has come back from wherever he goes for such a long period of time. Seeds.

Seeds are worthless.

Seeds are so worthless people pay money just to throw them away. People spend some time and energy deciding what kind of seed they are going to pay for, pay for them, put them in the ground, bury them, and hope to never see them again.

In spite of this strange behavior, no one stands in front of seed displays at the store and laughs as if the idea is so ridiculous. Everyone understands that is the way seeds work.

Seeds are not valuable as seeds. Seeds are only worth anything if we think of them as what they can become. Flowers, vegetables, bright colors...those are worth money and energy. So look at seed packets. They don't have pictures of seeds on them. They have pictures of petunias or corn...good things.

A seed is nothing but a promise. In fact, if the seeds you buy end up looking like they did when you bought them...the store will give you your money back. Nobody wants a seed.

Can you imagine keeping one? A little seed, there on the bedroom dresser? And every day you would look at it, and wonder, "Why am I keeping that seed?" ... Well you might ask.

Seeds are worthless **as seeds.** But people are glad they're for sale...People **understand** that a seed is valuable because of what it can grow.

Since we understand that so well about seeds, why don't we understand that about ourselves?

We are valuable. Our lives are the creation of God. But sometimes we see people who will do nothing more with their lives than preserve them...like a seed on the bedroom dresser. Perfectly preserved, in great shape, **and leaving the person wondering what it's there for.**

Jesus has something to say about seeds and about life. From our Gospel text this morning, "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."

The way to keep your life, is to use it the way God intended. Place it in the hands of God and see what happens. If we try to preserve our lives, it's like keeping a seed.

We live; we will die. Will our living or dying make any difference?

Understand what it means to be a creature of God. The life God created and gave to you - he has some ideas about how you should live it. We can put our lives in God's hands - or we can "preserve them". We can do all the things that the world tells us are ways to make successes of ourselves. Choose friends **because of what they can do for us** instead of the values we share. Learn things to **win arguments** instead of the joy of knowing. Teach your children **ways to get ahead** instead of how to find peace of mind. Put in so many hours to **support your family** that you never see them. Our society rewards those kinds of behavior. Our society calls those things "success". That is "preserving" our lives; that is the "pursuit of happiness". Working hard, to end up nowhere. Like a perfectly preserved seed, that is **wasted** because it is kept and not thrown into the ground.

Lose your life. It is a seed. Our lives are valuable because of what they can grow.

We don't become happy by "pursuing happiness". We become happy by living a life that means something.

"...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains **alone**; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." That is the judgement - being alone. A seed that is preserved; a life that looks out for itself; will be alone.

That is the result of **securing** a life, instead of letting God give **meaning** to a life. The result is being alone.

If the goal of life is "winning", that makes other people competitors. "Winning" is praised in our society. It gives an emotional lift. It does not give life meaning. **It leaves us alone.**

Success that comes from competition turns friends into enemies. People are either "useful" in helping to win...or an obstacle to happiness. That kind of success has to do with winning. It is interested in **power** and **control**. Jesus does not promise power or control. He speaks of putting our lives in the power and control of God and serving his creation.

People are not **useful**; they are **valuable**.

It is perfectly true that people complicate our lives. The less power and control we have over other people - the more they will complicate our lives.

Welcome the complications. Our lives are not to be preserved, undisturbed. Our lives are to grow.

We can place our lives in the lives around us and they will have meaning. They will not be the same day after day. They will not be secure and preserved. They will have meaning.

God, save us from valuing worthless seeds instead of the wonderful things they can grow. So that when life is over...we will not look at what we have worked so hard to accomplish and see a life that is protected, and self-determined, and controlled, and unchanged. As unchanged as a seed that still looks exactly like it did the first time it came out of the packet.

We would look at that life, so well taken care of, and say "I could have been a real human being. I could have had the satisfaction of caring for another person, of being generous, honest, devoted; I could have studied and learned; I could have disciplined myself to new things...I could have planted my life in God's people and grown."

But the seed has been preserved...and remains alone.

God's promise is not power, nor control. God never tells us that we will be in charge and successful. **God's promise is creation and growth.**

God does not give power; he calls us to love. We plant our lives in God's creation not to preserve our lives, but to do something with them. Grow, create, imagine new possibilities for what our lives can become. They will come out in unrecognizable colors: Forgiving people we've gotten used to being mad at. Valuing people we used to think were unimportant. Encouraging people we used to hope would fail. Helping the people at work

know they are important. Making our families glad we're home. That's a change. The flowers never look like the seeds.

Seeds are worthless - if they stay where they are. But people take the time and energy and expense to throw them away. Look what they become.

Our lives are worthless - until we go take the time and energy and expense of throwing them into God's hands. Look what they become.

Our lives will never be as valuable as they are when we are serving God. The things we can become. The joy we can bring. The church we can grow. The things we can learn. The people we can encourage. All those things are like the pictures on a packet of seeds. They describe what God can do with us.

Our lives are worth more than we could ever imagine...if we stop trying to keep them as they are. If we let God grow our lives into what he knows we can become.