

March 17, 2024
The Fifth Sunday in Lent
St. Stephen's, Catlett; St. Andrew's, Ada
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Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51:1-13
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:20-33

Most of us are familiar with the night Jesus spent in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest, where He asked God if maybe there wasn't another way to save humanity from itself. One account even tells us that Jesus sweated blood all night long (Luke 22:44). John typically tells a very different story. What we hear today is John's account of how Jesus came to the decision to die. In one single verse, Jesus admits that His soul is troubled, and He wonders if He should ask God to save Him from "His hour." Immediately He says "No, it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour." Then, as an act of complete faith and trust, He adds, "Father, glorify Your Name!" (12:27, 28). With those words, John's Gospel reaches its climax. Jesus is no victim in John; He is the instrument of God's redeeming work in all of creation. It's actually from John's Gospel that we get the term "Good Friday." While we do indeed have one more week of Lent, the curtain has risen today on the final act of Jesus' earthly life.

This text is important to us, because we sometimes agonize over difficult decisions we must make. Some of us may even have occasionally said that we were "sweating blood" or "sweating bullets" over the difficult choices we've had to make in our lives. It seems to me that we have two basic decisions we have to make: one is between two alternatives, sometimes equally unattractive, and the other is choosing to accept the inevitable without wasting time and energy on fighting it. Our text from Jeremiah offers us a way to approach both types of decisions, where God says He'll write His Law on our hearts (31:33). The Hebrew word Jeremiah uses for law, however, is *Torah*, which means instruction, guidance, and revelation, as well as law. That means that God's guidance and instruction are already written on our hearts. Perhaps we're using too much head and not enough heart? Or perhaps we either forgot, or never knew, that God's *Torah* is written on our hearts?

Perhaps in our anguish of trying to make the "right" decision, we are actually trying to save our own skin, trying to keep that one grain of wheat that we can still call our own from falling into the earth and dying. But the wheat only grows, says Jesus, when the grain falls into the earth. To us, it looks like the death of a seed, but in God's *Torah*, the seed rises from the ground and reproduces of itself. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give us a picture of a Jesus Who spends an entire night in agony, hoping for a different outcome. We can appreciate what he went through. John stands alone in presenting a Jesus Who takes a split second to consider His fate and then to embrace His eternal destiny while He offers each of us the same destiny.

We can agonize over an entire night of even longer – some people engage in years of agonizing – or we can take our cue from Jesus and let that last seed fall to the earth to rise again with nurturing powers we can't begin to imagine. If it's a choice between two options and we can't evaluate their relative merits, we do well to remember that God's *Torah* is inscribed in our very heart: God has already given us all the instruction, guidance, and revelation we need to make our choice. We just might not like it. If our task is to accept the inevitable, even when the inevitable is our own death in this world, then we do well to remember that it is for that very hour that we have come into this world, and it's time for God's Name to be glorified. We just might not like it. God has given us every grace to answer our own prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." Father, glorify thy Name.