

"Unless A Seed Falls"

Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:5-10 (Series B. 5th Sunday in Lent) Ps. 51:1-12

John 12:20-33

Let us pray: Creator and maker of us all - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts - grow thou in us and show us your ways and inspire us to live by your truth. Amen.

Jesus spoke often to his disciples about his death, but I wonder – do we really appreciate his death and understand what it means to us? Do we comprehend the price that was paid for our salvation?

Today, I wish to tell you a story that I read somewhere some 20 years ago - a story that is told by *Hank Hanegraaff* in a book called "*Christianity in Crisis*". The time was in the twenties. The place was Oklahoma. John Griffith was in his early twenties, newly married, and full of optimism. Along with his lovely wife, he had been blessed with a beautiful blue-eyed baby.

John wanted to be a traveller. He imagined what it would be like to visit faraway places with strange sounding names. He would read about them. His hopes and dreams were so vivid that, at times, they seemed more real than reality itself. But then came 1929 and the great stock market crash, then depression.

The crushing economy devastated John's dreams. Broken-hearted, he, like so many others, packed up his few possessions and, with his wife and little son, Greg, headed east in an old Model-A Ford. They made their way toward Missouri, to the edge of the Mississippi River, and there John found a job tending one of the great railroad bridges that spanned the massive river.

Day after day, John would sit in a control room and direct the massive gears of that huge bridge over the river. He would look out as bulky barges and splendid ships glided gracefully under his elevated bridge. Then, mechanically, he would lower the immense structure and stare thoughtfully into the distance as great trains roared by and became little more than specks on the horizon. Each day, he looked on sadly as his dreams of visiting far-off places and exotic destinations shattered.

It wasn't until 1937 that a new dream began to be born in his heart. His young son was now eight years old, and John had begun to catch a vision for a new life - a life in which Greg would work shoulder-to-shoulder with him, a life of intimate fellowship and friendship. The first day of this new life dawned, and father and son packed their lunches and, arm in arm, headed off toward the gigantic bridge.

Greg looked on with wide-eyed amazement as his dad pressed down the huge lever that raised and lowered the vast bridge. He marvelled that his father could single-handedly control the movements of such a stupendous structure.

Before they knew it, noontime had arrived. John had just elevated the bridge and allowed some scheduled ships to pass through. Then, taking his son by the hand, they headed off for lunch. Hand in hand, they inched their way down a narrow catwalk and out onto an observation deck that projected some 50 feet over the majestic Mississippi.

There they sat and watched spellbound as the ships passed by below. As they ate, John told his son, in vivid detail, stories about the marvellous destinations of the ships that sailed below. Enveloped in a world of thought, he related story after story, with his son hanging on every word.

Suddenly, John and his son were startled back to reality by the whistle of a distant train. Looking at his watch in disbelief, John saw that the bridge was still up and that the Memphis Express would be passing by in just minutes.

Not wanting to alarm his son, he suppressed his panic. In the calmest tone he could muster, he instructed his son to stay put. Leaping to his feet, he jumped onto the catwalk and ran at full tilt to the steel ladder leading into the control house. Once inside, he searched the river below to make sure that no ships were in sight, as he had been trained to do.

As he looked straight down beneath the bridge to make certain nothing was below, he saw something so terrifying that his heart froze in his chest. For there, below him in the massive gearbox that housed the colossal gears that moved the gigantic bridge, was his beloved son.

Apparently, Greg had tried to follow his Dad but had fallen off the catwalk. Even now, he was wedged between the teeth of two main moving parts in the gearbox. Although he appeared to be conscious, John could see that his son's leg had already begun to bleed profusely. Immediately, an even more horrifying thought flashed in his mind. For in that instant John knew that lowering the bridge meant killing his son. Panicked, his mind went in every direction, frantically searching for solutions.

Suddenly a plan emerged. In his mind's eye, he saw himself grabbing a coiled rope, climbing down the ladder, running down the catwalk, securing the rope, sliding down toward his son and pulling him back up to safety. Then, in an instant, move back to the control room and grab the control lever and thrust it down just in time for the on-coming train.

As soon as these thoughts appeared, he realized the futility of his plan. There just wouldn't be enough time. Perspiration began to bead on John's brow, terror written over every inch of his face. His mind darted here and there, vainly searching for yet another solution. What would he do? What could he do?

His thoughts rushed in anguish to the oncoming train. In a state of panic, his agonized mind considered the 400 or so people moving inescapably closer toward the bridge. Soon the train would come roaring out of the trees with tremendous speed. But this - this was his son - his only child - his pride - his joy. His mother - he could see her tear-stained face now. This was their child, their beloved son.

He knew, in a moment, there was only one thing he could do. He knew he would have to do it. And so, burying his face under his left arm, he plunged down the lever. The cries of his son were quickly drowned out by the relentless sound of the bridge as it ground into position. With only seconds to spare, the Memphis Express - with its 400 passengers - roared out of the trees and across the mighty bridge. John Griffith lifted his tear-stained face and looked into the windows of the passing train. A businessman was reading the morning paper. A uniformed conductor was glancing casually at his large vest pocket watch. Ladies were already sipping their afternoon tea in the dining car. A small boy, looking strangely like his own son, pushed a long thin spoon into a dish of ice-cream. Many of the passengers seemed to be engaged in

either idle conversation or careless laughter. But no one looked his way. No one even cast a glance at the giant gearbox that housed the mangled remains of his hopes and dreams. In anguish he pounded the glass in the control room and cried out, *"What's the matter with you people? Don't you care? Don't you know I've sacrificed my son for you? What's wrong with you people?"*

No one answered; no one heard. No one even looked. Not one of them seemed to care. And then, as suddenly as it had happened, it was over. The train disappeared, moving rapidly across the bridge and out over the horizon (*The end*).

This story is but a faint glimpse of what God the Father did for us – of what Jesus did for us in offering up, for us, his own life. Unlike the Memphis Express that caught John Griffith by surprise, God - in his great love for us - determined to sacrifice His Son so that we might live.

"He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for our sake" (*1Peter 1:20*). Jesus was not accidentally caught in the gears of a bridge - as was John's son. Rather, he willingly sacrificed His life for the sins of humankind. Hear these words from today's gospel reading once again.

"Now my soul is troubled," said Jesus. "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." The suffering and the death of Jesus had a purpose. Those who join themselves to him, those who grasp that he was lifted up on the cross for them and in faith submit their own suffering and their own pain to his, honour what God has done. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (*Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:18*).

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains but a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit." Love given is love multiplied; love only taken is love lost. God himself glorified Christ upon the cross; he multiplied the work that Jesus did on earth, rewarding him for his faithfulness by granting to all who call upon his name, and who walk in his way, forgiveness for their sins and life everlasting.

Jesus was a seed -- like you and I, He was a seed which did not stay lifeless in the bag, but which instead fell to the ground and gave up all that made him a single seed, thereby giving life to others. In doing so, Jesus conquered evil, and destroyed the power of sin and death. We empty ourselves of our desire to save our life as it is. Turn to Jesus and call upon his name and his strength, that we may become a seed that, instead of remaining lifeless in the bag, falls to the ground and receives new life and gives new life to the world.

Alone we are nothing, we have no power that lasts beyond the day but, with God, we are a mighty host, able to endure and to triumph with those who are responsive to his call. It is difficult to comprehend the will of God, difficult to grasp just what He has done. But we know this - and we are called to accept this - and to embrace this - that it was done for us - so that we might live.

I would like to leave you with a riddle. What does a *salmon*, a *seed*, and *you* and I have in common? If you understand the answer to that riddle, you will see Jesus.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Lamb of God # 336
- In the Cross of Christ I Glory # 324
- Rock of Ages # 623

Prayer concerns:

Ingeborg Eidnes, & Matilda Molyneau-Piper & Wess Bourgaize & COVID-19 patients, essential and frontline workers.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Eternal God, break us out of our self-protecting shells to die to temporal distractions that, rooted in the holy ground of Christ, our spiritual fruitfulness may nourish our souls as You guide us all into eternal life. We ask through Jesus, our great High Priest; and the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier; who together with You, live, love, and reign as One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Wedding Anniversary

Johannes and Ingeborg Eidnes

Good News from the Government of Quebec:

In-person worship with 25 persons starts on March 26...which means there will be Easter Celebration this year around, praise God! Palm Sunday will be our first day back (March 28). There will also be Good Friday service at the regular time 11:00 a.m. No Easter Breakfast in Church, but hey you may have one at home before Resurrection Celebration. Thank you all for your patience. I am looking forward to seeing you all again. Please pass the good news around.