

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:5-10

Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

John 12:20-33

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.

Welcome.

I wanted to start with saying the gospel of John is challenging. It was barely covered in my lay preaching class! I've heard this text all my life and no one in these walls has ever really preached on it. Or maybe they did and I didn't hear it.

Let me unpack this a bit as I have tried for myself to discern this text ...

First and foremost this is slow work.

"When asked how they practiced their faith, medieval monks would say, "By falling down and getting up." I dare to say this sounds suspiciously similar to the grain of wheat falling to the earth, dying and then bearing fruit. I think falling down is essentially the same as dying in this text. I think dying is a metaphor and it is used for impact.

I don't know about you but I hate falling down. My bike, skiing and running, these falls have never been pleasant. Why God I beg, do I need to fall? And why do I need to keep falling?

Looking at the Hebrew text we hear that Jesus experienced something similar, a struggle of some sort, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears." This offers some clues that Jesus' human self experienced this falling down, a setback, maybe a despair. What I notice here is that Jesus goes back to God with prayers and supplications.¹ Ok not sure about you all but I had to look up supplications and get this, supplication is the act of asking, begging for something earnestly or humbly. Let me stop there

¹ Oxford language Dictionary online.google.com

and tell you how affirming this is! Jesus begged. I so get this!! I also beg God and I'm not proud of this. I so want to have patient trust. So there's hope for me!! In the meantime I pray for patient trust.

Richard Rohr has a book called, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. In this book, Rohr teaches us that we can't understand the meaning of "up" until we have fallen "down."² What's the just of this dying or falling down? "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain;" ?

Let us remember last week we heard John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Pastor Salying made some good points about John...And I believe they are helpful in understanding today's text.

1. Salvation in the Gospel of John is a non-linear experience.

Yep to me this is there will be ups and downs, falling down and clarity and plain ole confusion, ie periods of being in suspense and incomplete This happens to me daily and sometimes hourly.

2. We are always in a contest of wills with God.

² Amazon book cover.

Yep this is me saying God, you know I think this kid of mine really needs this grade, job, award, college acceptance, rather than your will be done, ie trust.

3. Belief in the Gospel of John means to trust. And trust requires relationship. It is not to hold a proposition to be true.

Yep this is a relationship necessity putting in the time and showing up. It is falling down over and over.

4. Judgment in the Gospel of John comes from the Greek word, krisis. The crisis demands a judgment, a decision. Do you choose to surrender to grace or will you cling to your own sense of power?

Yep this is a daily practice and sometimes that decision isn't true but God redirects just like GPS never leaving me.

When I put these above principles into context of today's gospel it still feels incomplete. I need more. For me to fully accept this scripture I sat with it for a few days. Where God led me was to one of my old prayers from a Jesuit friend, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good
will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
excerpted from *Hearts on Fire*

I know that God helps me when I trip or fall. God is my friend saying, "You will get through this," as I lean into this space of being incomplete and in suspense. And I cling to the Psalmist word, delight. The delight is mutual. And if we look back to Jeremiah, we hear "a new covenant...they shall all know me." This to me means it's a new relationship, a new covenant not the one sided one where God, "took them by the hand."³ Talk about a

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<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/lectionary-commentary-lent-5?rq=John%2012%3A20-33>

sense of delight! I don't know about you but this is good, I'll take relationships over blind guiding any day.

In this growing relationship I know I will fall and sometimes that fall will be hard but there will always be the hand, voice or feeling of you will get through this. I'll insert into my take of the gospel this will take time and there will be patient trust in a nonlinear way but in the way that Angela needs. And I'll end with a few words from Anne Lamott's book, *Plan B Further Thoughts On Faith*, "...Augustine said that you have to start your relationship with God all over from the beginning, every day. Yesterday's faith does not wait for you like a dog with your slippers and the morning paper in its mouth. You seek it, and in seeking it, you find it. Here's to the daily seeking/ or falling to build a relationship which bears fruit.