

**Letting Go (of Your Life)**  
**Lent 5, Year B**  
**28 March 2009**

On the wheat growing farms in the mid Canterbury Ellesmere district, the months of January and February are an anxious time. The harvest is due, but judging the right time to begin the harvest is everything. Too soon and the wheat is green, too late and it is past its prime. And the weather can still play nasty tricks. Odd though it may seem hail can come in high summer, and in the perverse nature of hail belts one field's crop may be wiped out, while the one just over the fence remains unscathed.

At funerals I often read from 1 Corinthians 15 because it has some of the most powerful images in Scripture to explain what happens to us next:

The seed you sow does not come to life unless it has first died; and what you sow is not the body that shall be, but a naked grain, perhaps of wheat...What is sown in the earth in the earth as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. Sown in humiliation it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; sown as an animal body, it is raised as a spiritual body.

Though every instinct in us cries out to cling to what we have and are, apparently we have to let go of all that is, in order to be transformed into what God has in mind for us.

When I die I hope to meet that final crisis of my earthly life with all the courage and dignity I can muster. Given my cultural background I guess I will try to do that in a low-key, ironic, laconic way, revealing as little emotional turmoil as possible,

keeping the lid on any physical distress I might be feeling. The Greek philosopher Socrates is a kind of a model for this kind of exit. Sentenced to die by drinking hemlock for corrupting the minds of the young with his philosophy, he stayed up late on the last night of his life discussing the meaning of life with his disciples, then calmly drank the poison in front of them, and met his fate impassively.

Oddly enough Jesus of Nazareth didn't take this stiff upper approach to his own death at all. As this morning's Hebrews reading indicates he was rather more Mediterranean in his behaviour, offering "up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had power to save him out of death." Stoicism wasn't his strong suit at all. He was mightily afraid and he showed it. But in the end he was prepared to go along with his heavenly Father's will. On that last night of his life he struggles to let go of his life in order that it might become something else, though it felt like abandonment.

There is a double-edged quality to the passion narratives of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the one hand the Father is driving the story in such a way that the death of Jesus becomes inevitable – Jesus is proceeding to his death according to the intention of the God who sent him on his mission of reclamation and rescue in the first place. On the other hand God, in the person of Jesus, will absorb the malice and violence of humankind in rebellion against him. He will draw the full weight of rejection on to himself and just take it as a way of dealing to it.

For Jesus to receive his death in such a way a rather impressive life had obviously preceded it. In him the promise of the prophet Jeremiah had come true:

Deep within them I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts.

This is the culmination and the high point of the religion of the Old Testament. The Covenant, the relationship of promise between God and his people – the Law, the ladder between heaven and earth that graciously lets the people of God know how to behave in every situation in their lives – these two connection points between God and his people will no longer be external instruments written on tablets of stone. To those who are open to the Spirit of God, all this will become internalised as an inner directed God centred way of living out a life of faith, hope and love. In Jesus of Nazareth this promise came true. This was a life in which the Law written on one's heart came to life in an exemplary fashion, as faith worked itself out in love. Here was the perfect Law driven life, but ironically a Law shaped religious culture would feel obliged to put its finest example to death.

Francis Moloney has written well of this morning's gospel passage:

The opponents "of Jesus fail because they are clinging with closed fists to what is theirs: they love their lives. They make an absolute of what this world can offer and thus they lose life. The one who is prepared to let go, to hate this life has eternal life, a totally satisfying life both here and hereafter...Jesus points to the Father and informs his listeners that service of Jesus, looking beyond the absolutes of this world, being where he is, falling into the ground in a loving "letting go" of the absolutes being imposed by "this world, will bear fruit" and lead to the servant's being honoured by the Father.

When the harvest of my life comes due I pray that it may result in a high yield because I am able to fall into the ground in a loving letting go. May God's timing be good, may my courage, and my faith, and hope, and love be high.