

Homily March 17 2024 5th Sunday of Lent St. Patrick's Day © Teresa Elder Hanlon
Jeremiah 31:31-34a; Ps. 25 "I Lay Open"; Galatians 6:7b-10 (FNV); John 12:20-33 (CCL)

When have you been forced to accept change in your life or admit change into your life? That something is happening and there's no holding it off? We realize the reality of what is taking place and feel resistance to the change.

For several years before I said 'yes' to the call of ordination, I received obvious invitations to acknowledge a call through events that resonated with my authentic self. To serve as an ordained minister was written on my heart. For instance, people would tell me of meaningful moments for them from my prayer at the altar when we brought communion to shut-ins. One Saturday evening at Mass, after playing and singing the last hymn at the piano, I felt a sudden rush of love for the congregation, holy, overwhelming love. I received numerous invitations to preach, especially from women's groups. Seven times in a couple of weeks, not once or twice or three times, but SEVEN times within 2 weeks, people I met as a spiritual director and I, myself, drew a the same card from a deck of spiritual images and words by Melanie Weidner entitled "*Listen for Joy: Come Through Collection.*" That card was "Faith" and the first invitation of faith was written, "To have confidence that the way will open. To commit the time, energy, and devotion required for a seedling to become fruit."

And yet, I held back, saying in so many words, "My hour has not yet come." I could not directly acknowledge and accept the meaning of these signs as a call for me to act. And then Christ Jesus, my buddy, began to use the words "ordination" and "priesthood" on book covers and in chapters of books and John O'Donohue's Book of Blessings on the pages I opened to. These were scary words and reality for me. They drove home the message that this change needed action on my part. And finally, with numerous scriptures, invitations, and cards of "Surrender" and "Yes Chicken" that the hour had come. There would be no more just noting these events, I would have to respond. I would have to admit the truth and reality to myself and to others and act on it.

In today's gospel, Jesus is in a similar predicament. He admits to those around him and to himself that the hour that he has put off throughout the last several years, has come.

And it's an uncomfortable feeling.

The tipping point for Jesus is the news from Philip and Andrew, two disciples with Greek names themselves, that strangers from Greece, outsiders, want to meet him. While we in the pews have heard many references over the years to that phrase "my hour has not yet come," this news from Philip and Andrew signals the reality that his hour *has* come. His reaction? Can I get out of this?

Richard Rohr mentions in this week's daily journal entries that "People with a distorted image of self, world, or God will be largely incapable of experiencing what is *Really Real* in the world. They'll see instead what *they* need reality to be."

I think this insight informs what is going on in this story when Jesus says, "But now, I am troubled. What shall I say? 'O Holy One, save me from this hour?'" That sounds to me like resistance to inevitable—a very human reaction. Brendan Byrne in his commentary on John tells us that this passage from John is the equivalent of the Garden of Gethsemane stories in the synoptic gospels where Jesus sweats blood and cries out, "If You can, take this cup from me!"

His next line in today's story is, "But it is for this very hour that I came in the first place! Abwoon D'Bwashmaya, glorify Your Name!"

Rohr quotes Aundi Kolber saying, "We honour our stories, our pain, and the actual flesh-and-blood realities we live with. ... This is where we *must* begin." Jesus acknowledges his own resistance and then puts first the reality of glorifying God through his imminent death.

He notes, too, with his reference to the seed that dies alone, that the fruit will be bountiful community. "Unless a grain of wheat shall fall into the ground and die, it remains but a single grain." But if it is buried, "it yields a great harvest." This idea is repeated in the second reading from *Small Man* Paul "if you plant the seeds of the Spirit, then from the Spirit you will harvest the life of the world to come that never fades away, full of beauty and harmony."

And Jeremiah tells us that such seeds of the Spirit have been planted in us, in our hearts by the Holy One of All. We can listen and hear, within our own hearts, from the Divine: Abwoon D'Bwashmaya in Aramaic—"Birther," and "Iihsipaitapiyo'pa", Blackfoot for "Source of all Being". What is the reality this intimate mystery, from which we come, written on our hearts for our lives?

Someone who, this past Friday, listened to the Brian E. Pearson podcast of my story remembered when I first told him about my answering the call to priesthood with a 'yes'. It was back in February 2020 that we had met. He exclaimed in his email, "Look where you are now!" And this is not just about me. The Holy One in Jeremiah says, "All of them, from the least to the greatest alike, shall know me." Yes, look at where we are now, coming up to our first AGM!

When something dies, it makes space for something else to grow, that God's name, Abwoon D'Bwashmaya, the Great Spirit be glorified. "When I am lifted up from the earth," Jesus says, "I will draw all people to myself."

One favorable, heart felt response to the Holy One's call this Lent is stated in our psalm. "I lay open my whole life to you, trusting you O Holy One."

QUESTIONS

What words or phrases or ideas stood out for you in today's readings? Or you might describe when you knew that change was here and you had to admit it to yourself and others.