**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**

So also 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 for ever, 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 honour.

‘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 judgement 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.

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

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 reading from Jeremiah this morning.

And then, from the letter to the Hebrews, which the 9.45 congregation will hear: 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…

And finally: 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 thread that I see running through all these readings is prayer. We come to know God in many ways, one of which is through prayer. Then we are told that Jesus prayed and was heard by God. And finally Jesus considers how and what to pray, and gets a response – an audible response - from God.

The thing about knowing lots of priests is that you get caught up in lots of conversations about theology and indeed other stuff too. A friend of mine was chatting to a group of five and six year olds recently, who were visiting his church, and he gathered from their teachers that the children were ostensibly learning about prayer. But small children being small children of course, when he asked them what they had been doing, they really couldn’t say. So he phrased it differently: what did you learn about praying that would help me to do praying. Nothing. Until finally one little chap plucked up the courage, and said: Flowers. And my friend thought: is he answering that question? or something else entirely. But hmm, what happens if we think about prayer in terms of flowers.

Even when we are trying to be quite sophisticated when we talk about prayer, or think about prayer, or even actually pray, we still think a little bit in terms of a response, an answer to our prayer. I ask and then I get. There’s often something of that thought process going on. So this friend of mine started wondering: what if that little boy is right? And what if praying is about planting something that grows and comes to have a life of its own; that then comes to blossom (or fruit perhaps) at some point; that may not have anything to do with the direct answer/experience that we thought we were praying for, but where something happens in us by that praying, that enables us to grow in the depth of our relationship with God.

So it’s not a direct response – this is what I was praying about, or, I do this and then this happens. So by that token, prayer is like flowers: we don’t have control over it, it is almost independent – and we simply open ourselves up to that growth.

So then, what about these Greeks who found Philip and said to him: Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Isn’t that, for us, one of the reasons we pray at all? To get to see God. To answer our questions and to learn how to grow in faith. We look for evidence of God in our prayers; if those prayers are answered in a way that we can connect with, then we take that as proof that God is listening to us. But if not, it is all too easy to say: if we have no answer – or no recognisable answer – or not the answer we want, then surely that means God isn’t on our side after all…….

Today’s gospel is set in Jerusalem: people are gathering for the festival of Passover. People are preparing… making plans … The meal of unleavened bread… bitters… roast lamb…all being prepared. Families getting together. The whole works.

This particular occasion though, there is a noticeable difference at the festival; rumours have been spreading that the long awaited Messiah may also make an appearance. Crowds gather, hoping to see some sort of a sign. Some in the crowd have already seen some of the wondrous deeds Jesus has done. Others have only heard about them. But they gather in the hope that they might see something great.

Even foreigners, from Greece, have heard about him, and are in the crowd, asking about seeing Jesus. It is understandable that they are curious about him, wondering whether he might have the leadership qualities needed to form an opposition to the Roman Empire. This was the meaning – at least in their minds – of the term Messiah.

But unfortunately Jesus seems a bit preoccupied. The Greeks aren’t getting the sort of welcome they might have expected and hoped for. And welcome is such an important ministry within church. Jesus barely acknowledges their presence - instead he is speaking about the coming of his hour…and glory… and then launches into a science lesson about wheat production. And then before they can grasp that concept about the grain of wheat dying in order to produce more, Jesus is talking about loving, and losing life, and eternal life.

He carries on the lesson by talking about the requirements for, and consequences of, becoming his followers, and how they must follow and stay with him. And he ends this monologue with resignation, troubled about his destiny, with the appointed hour fast-approaching. To the casual observer looking for leadership qualities, this encounter - the evidence - does little which might convince people that Jesus possesses any at all.

What they see in this so-called leader is less that they expect. After the long journey to Jerusalem, rather than doing what they hoped he might, Jesus is apparently resigned to death, not taking on a new leadership role. The evidence all points to the obvious: Jesus is not an adequate leader. Their prayers appear not to be answered. Where is the mighty king they had so longed for?

But then: Flowers. Like the little boy with the unexpected answer to the question about prayer, what seems to be completely off the wall acquires a meaning. We who have the benefit of hindsight, as it were, see this scene with different eyes.

Jesus’ leadership is not political. And it is not about power. We know about Jesus’ appointed hour and what it means. We hear the metaphor about the dying grain of wheat - which produces a large harvest - and it makes sense to us. We see Jesus willing to lose his life to save the lives of many, including us. We hear the voice from heaven and know that it is more than just thunder.

Those Greeks did get to see Jesus, though not as they had anticipated.

Jesus offered up prayers and supplications to the one who was able to save him from death – and he was heard. But still had to go through death.

A voice did come from heaven – though some heard it as thunder and some interpreted it as an angel.

What is prayer? Flowers. Something unexpected, but beautiful. Something fruitful, though not what we thought we asked for or wanted. Prayer grows and yields what we need. And builds our relationship with God.

**Amen**