

Sunday 26th August, 2018
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

1 Kings 8:22-30,41-43

Psalm 84

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Peter answered Jesus “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Over the past 5 Sundays we have been hearing from a single chapter of John’s Gospel. Beginning with the story of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, where 5000 people were fed, Jesus has been teaching the disciples and a large crowd who have been following him. And his teaching has focused on the image of bread, and how the sort of bread that we normally eat will not satisfy our hunger for very long, but that God can provide what Jesus calls Spiritual Bread, which Jesus comes to bring the people - a bread that will sustain them forever.

In the Gospel reading today we hear that many people were complaining because this teaching of Jesus was hard. And so he asks his twelve disciples specifically - “what about you - do you also wish to go away?”

It’s a question which is actually still very real for us all today - what about us? Will we also go away? How will we continue with our Christian faith as it is pushed further and further to the margins by society? How will we continue in our walk of faith when popular opinion says we should chase after those things which will be good for us, rather than things that might benefit others?

Will we also find that this following Christ is all too hard? Will we decide, as some of those early followers did, to walk away?

“What about you”, Jesus says - “do you also wish to go away?” And it is a question that is especially asked of you today, Wesley, Christiana, Charlise, and Christopher, as you take the next step in your faith journey and join other faithful people here in sharing at the altar rail the gifts of bread of wine. How will you walk in Christ’s way? How will you make a difference in the world for the sake of Christ.

A few weeks ago now, Pope Francis spoke to sixty thousand young Catholic people who had gathered in Rome for a Pilgrimage. In what I think was quite an extraordinary speech, he encouraged them to live lives of faith, although he acknowledged how hard it would be.

“It is true, it is not easy, but remember - I will say it again - the way of holiness is not for the lazy,” the Pope said.

In a question and answer session, Pope Francis advised the pilgrims to “know and love the Lord Jesus more and more,” encountering him in prayer, at Communion, through reading Scripture, and to recognize him in the poor. And he reminded the young people that to do all of these things did not require any special education. “It’s important!” he said. “To learn how to be merciful it is not necessary to go to university or to receive a degree, all can learn.”

So, I wonder - how can we live lives of mercy; of faithfulness to Christ and his Gospel? Perhaps first and foremost we are called to be *kind*. Kindness may sound easy; we might feel as though we are generally pretty good at that. But it is more challenging than it seems. Because our calling as Christians is to be kind not only to those who we like, or to our friends and family only. Rather, Jesus says we need to be kind to everyone, even those who we find it difficult to like. Pope Francis also said the same thing, as he encouraged his young listeners to be friends with everyone, “no strings attached,” in order to be a “ray of Jesus’ light,” because, he said, everyone needs friends who give a good example and who give without expecting anything in return.

We are called to be *generous*. To be generous doesn't mean that we need to have lots of money and then give it away - there are lots of other ways in which we can be generous. We can be generous in our time - being there for other people who need us, or sitting with someone who is upset, even if we would rather be running around the oval with our friends. We can be generous in the way we use our gifts - helping a fellow classmate with some work that we understand and maybe they don't. And we can be generous in our friendship - remembering that everyone is made and loved by God, so all are deserving of our companionship and love.

We are all called to be *patient*. Remember, you are not perfect - I am not perfect; Reverend Rachel is not perfect; so don't be surprised when other people do something that you disagree with, or do something that hurts you. And it is really hard to not react negatively in those situations. But being patient means being able to forgive people when they do wrong by us, because we recognize that we will also make mistakes, and we will also need forgiveness.

Finally, we are called to be humble - to not think more of ourselves than is healthy - to not always have to be the one at the centre of attention, or in the middle of the circle. If we can point to others that may be quieter than us, then we can help to build them up, to build their confidence, their self-esteem, their resilience. It is also an acknowledgement that our gifts are given to us by God. Yes, we may work hard to perfect them, but the humble person always recognizes the origins of these gifts, and the call to use them in God's service.

Kindness, generosity, patience, humility - these are the signs of a life that is filled with God's Spirit. And this is the sort of life that will naturally be a sign of a Christian. Again, the Pope said, "Even now, as young people, you can be apostles, capable of drawing others to Jesus. This will happen if you are full of enthusiasm for him, if you have encountered him, if you have come to know him personally, and been yourselves 'won over' by him," he said.

And in all of this it is not so much about your words. Rather, much more important are your actions, your closeness, your desire to serve others. In this way, you will also help others to see how wonderful it is to be a part of a community of faith, because God is in its midst.

Sharing Communion, sharing in this Spiritual Bread about which Jesus has been speaking, is one of the ways that we are strengthened for this life of service in the world. Along with reading the Bible, praying, and being part of a community of believers, sharing Communion is the way in which we are fed as Christians. So today, we welcome you; Wesley, Christiana, Charlise, and Christopher. We welcome you to this community of faith, and we welcome you to share with us at the altar rail.

Peter, together with the other followers of Jesus who stayed to the end, recognizes the one, eternal truth; “Lord, to whom can we go?” This is their desperate cry. And so, they stay; they stay to feed on these eternal words as we are asked to do, Sunday after Sunday, when we receive “the Bread of Life, the Cup of Salvation.”

Let us, together with Simon Peter proclaim boldly, “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

In the name of God. Amen