

John 6.56-69; Joshua 24.1-2a, 14-18; Eph. 6.10-20
12th Sunday after Trinity, 23rd August 2015
8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

Grant, O God, that in the written word, and through the spoken word, we may behold the Living Word, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

‘Abiding in Christ’

These last few weeks of August we’ve been hearing some pretty fundamental teaching from Jesus about the nature of the Bread of Life. About how *he himself* is the bread of life, enabled by God in the feeding of the five thousand to satisfy physical hunger, and enabled by God to feed all of us, for evermore, though symbolic participation around his Table in the act of Holy Communion. But this act of participation can be extended into all of our lives, and be more than something we just do now and again.

Today, Jesus speaks to us of how we can ‘abide’ in him and he in us. I love this word, ‘abide,’ it has a whole range of meaning: ‘to remain in expectation,’ to ‘wait,’ to ‘pause’ or to ‘delay,’ to ‘stay’ or ‘remain’ in some place or state, or just simply to ‘reside’ or to ‘dwell.’ I think Jesus uses the term because he knows that any or all of these understandings can serve. We can wait in Jesus, we can stay with Jesus, we can dwell with Jesus. He is the ultimate ‘host,’ in all the subtle connotations of that word, waiting to greet and receive us at any time or in any place.

He goes further. Whilst teaching openly in the synagogue at Capernaum he says that any who will partake symbolically of his flesh and blood can ‘abide’ with him always, and that

this ‘always’ will mean just that, it will be the means to the transcendence of death, both physical and spiritual. Not just his own, by which all these things become possible, but for everyone who ‘abides’ in him.

⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

Jesus will be able to do this as long as he has the courage to go through with his destiny, which he seems to know. Not that I think God wanted Jesus to suffer and to die – it was humanity who made him suffer that, and I believe we still cause God pain today. Whenever we’re being angry, or act selfishly towards one another, or fail to hide our disappointment in something someone said or did, whenever one of God’s children responds with active or even passive aggression, we still make the God/Man suffer, but we have trouble understanding that’s what we’re doing.

And that’s precisely the case with some of the disciples; in response to his asking them to ‘abide’ in him so that they may live for ever, they say, ‘**This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?**’ So Jesus asks them, ‘**Does this offend you?**’ Knowing that one day he will be uplifted to heaven, what he’s really asking is, ‘do you really need to see another miracle at work on human bodies to believe what I’m saying to you.’ He pushes home the argument, ⁶³**It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit *and* life**’ (my italics).

In other words, having a body and providing it with food is not enough to truly live. If we want to find a truly genuine existence then we must embrace the life of the Spirit, in other words, we should really dig deep into what Jesus is saying. Some disciples can't cope with this and walk away, but then there is one who *has* begun to understand something. Jesus is concerned that he has pushed his followers too far,

⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?'

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Note how Peter now speaks for all the disciples. 'We' have come to believe... Maybe this is why Jesus says, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.' Because faith like that of Peter's is a gift of God's grace – not given to everyone, and sometimes it can be taken away.

Those of us who are confident in our faith should never take for granted the gift. And similarly, for those who are on the edge of belief, or who haven't yet found it, we should remember that this is God's gift for the granting, no one else's, and he will grant it or not in his own good time - but there's nothing to stop any of us asking in prayer for grace – (Collect) our God is always ready to hear.

So the key realization is Peter's. 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.' He seems to have understood that Jesus differentiates between death and

mortality. Mortality is part of the human condition – our bodies degrade as we grow older or sicker and end up unable to support life in this world. But Jesus is concerned about the transcendence of death in life, the death of the spirit, which dies a little every time we sin and put up barriers between ourselves and God. He is concerned that we should maintain our approach to God in this life by turning away from evil in all its subtle, attractive and delusionary forms.

So we must learn patience and live in hope. The Lord our God is a merciful God. Christ is the embodiment of love, goodness and truth that gives the lie to any manifestation of evil. Humanity is God's creation and not inherently evil. The faithful can follow Paul's advice from his letter to the Ephesians,

¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places... ..take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In other words, allow yourself to abide in Christ the Living Word, to wait on him, to rest in him, to dwell in him. Be patient and live in hope, and take the time and trouble to find him abiding in your heart.

Spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 6.56-69

The Words of Eternal Life

⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Joshua 24.1-2a,14-18

The Tribes Renew the Covenant

24

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.

14 'Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

16 Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.'

Eph. 6.10-20

The Whole Armour of God

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.