

Bethel Anglican Church

St. John's Street at the Point

St. John's, Antigua

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 16 (B)

August 22, 2021

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“To whom do we turn”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

John 6:56-69

Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This 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 forever.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that

gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But 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. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “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.”

Abide with us, O Lamb of God, that we may taste, hear, and know that you are the Holy One of God sent to us. Amen.

A mature watermelon weighs two hundred thousand times as much as a watermelon seed. When we can't even begin to understand how the watermelon seed does that, grow by two hundred thousand times its original weight, how can we contemplate God? one person asks. But indeed a tiny seed of faith will grow into a full grown

Christian if we nurture them. And every Christian changes the entire world at least a little bit. One Christian affects the lives of seven billion other people. Isn't that amazing?! But of course, it is not the Christian him- or her-self, but the seed of Christ that is growing and multiplying inside of a Christian. Through each of us, Christ is changing the world, and Christ is fully populating the spiritual world using us. You are important to Christ; I am important to Christ; all Christians are very important to Christ!

The Risen Lord no longer has flesh and blood; instead he works in and through each of us. We are the minds he uses; we are the hands he uses; we are the feet, the bodies Christ needs and uses, daily and always. We are absolutely necessary to Christ!

There is so much half-truth telling nowadays--perhaps it has been so from time immemorial. But in our day and age maybe you have heard some of the following fibs, or should we call them little white lies?

"The check is in the mail." "I'll start my diet tomorrow." "Leave your resume and we'll get back to you." "This hurts me more than

you." "I just need a moment of your time."
"You can tell me. I won't breathe a word."
"I'm a social drinker, and I can quit any time I want to." "The engine is **supposed** to make that noise." "I can get another forty miles when the gas gauge is on empty." "It's not the money. It's the principle." You could probably add more, but it is too painful to continue!

James Moore in his book, "Dimensions for Living," tells the story about a high rise building fire that happened some years ago in Chicago. Flames and smoke blocked the view of all the escape routes on the tenth floor, so people on that floor went out onto a

balcony. But they were trapped there because the fire ladders and climbers could not get up that high. It appeared that they were doomed. However, one man in the group decided to try to find an escape route. He went back into the smoke-filled hallway and found the door to the fire stairs. He crawled back to the balcony and announced his discovery. One person said later, "You can't imagine the feeling of relief and joy we felt when that man came back for us and said, 'There is a way out. Follow me. I know the way.' But only some of those on the balcony followed his lead. The others refused to go with him. They didn't believe

him or trust him and would not follow.

They gave up and stayed on the balcony, and none of them made it. Life was there for them, but they refused to accept it, and they perished. It's very sad to have someone who can help us, but we turn our back on them out of a lack of trust. In Jesus' case, Jesus claimed to be the way to eternal life. And if he is indeed the Holy One from God, if it is true that only he had the words of everlasting life, shouldn't we listen and obey him? Whom will we trust? We can trust Jesus. He is the escape route from eternal damnation.

People leave their faith for various reasons. Perhaps a prayer wasn't answered to our satisfaction. Or the church programs didn't meet our needs. Or our toes were stepped on. Or a church decision was made that we didn't like, and so on. But probably the main reason people leave a church is really because they cannot believe Christ's claims any more than those could who turned away from Jesus long ago. His teachings are too tough, his demands too far reaching. Many don't really believe Christ's words, because if they did, none of the reasons for leaving listed would be sufficient

to make them turn away from the church which is Christ's body.

Being told that Jesus did miracles for others may make some resentful that God did not do that for them. Yet others stay with an active worshipping faith in spite of a thousand questions because Jesus' words are the best they have ever heard. To walk away from Christ is to cut ourselves off from the community that empowers us to live and love as Christ lived and loved. Leaving our church community diminishes our ability to live and help others. We admire those who refuse to turn away in

spite of heartache, anxiety, and grievous burdens.

There was once a popular song that had the line, "Who can I turn to if you turn from me?"

Dr. Walter Percy, a Christian writer and physician, lay dying as he spoke to an interviewer. He was asked, "Would you consider turning away from your faith at a time like this?" He asked, "What else is there?" The interviewer went on, "Well, there's humanism, materialism, agnosticism, Marxism, behaviorism, Buddhism; there's astrology and occultism and metaphysics."

And Dr. Percy replied, "That's what I mean. What else is there?"

How far will we go to be with others and with Christ? Where do we 'draw the line' on how far we're willing to go? The lines we draw and refuse to cross may be the starting lines for Christ in our life.

In the play, "The Merchant of Venice," (I, iii), Bassanio says, "If it pleases you, dine with us." Shylock answers, "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so on; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you...."

Aristotle defined character as the decision a person makes when the choice is not obvious.

Thomas Merton in one of his lectures said, "In times of deep loss and hardship, staying with Jesus is not an easy choice. It's far easier to give in to despair, anger, and frustration. [But] to give in is to give up the best."

Humorist Art Buchwald noted, "Whether these are the worst of times or the best of times, they are the only times we have."

Pastor Grant Gallup noted that our choices are what God we will follow, whom

we will serve, what we will swallow, and whom God will carry home.

Will the god we have chosen be able to carry us to an eternal abiding place?

The early church writer, Tertullian, said, "Faith is to believe the absurd."

Do we find our beliefs only to be what is logical and [quote] "reasonable" [unquote]? Or is faith not what we have when logic and reason fail? Does our faith transcend the experience of physical law?

Pastor Donald Macleod noted that other religions are escapes from life, but Christianity sets us free to be who we are.

An agnostic said he would give his right hand to believe what Christians believe.

Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. He who eats this bread will live forever."

There is a dramatic depiction of hell near the end of Dante's "Inferno". The Roman god Saturn is seen with three mouths, all eating some infamous traitor--Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot. Contrast that with the image of eating the bread that came down from heaven.

A missionary noted a sign in a country market that said, "We are selling cheap crosses." "We are selling cheap crosses."

Indeed, we may hear others selling cheap crosses. These philosophies say we will always find success if we do thus and so. Some tell us to program our innate reactions so we avoid failure and always pursue success. And, of course when we buy their educational tapes and books and classes, they become richer and we become poorer!

But the cross is never an easy way to follow. The cross is not a surefire way to success and fame and fortune. The cross is just that, the way of suffering and trials. But how else can we follow faithfully and without deviation? Our Lord and Savior has set before us the way of life and salvation.

It is the only way to eternity. It is the only way to God's heart. For us to choose another way is to choose death, for all eternity. We are free to choose what we will. But for us and for our church family we will choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and salvation. By his wounds we are healed. By his death we are raised with him to eternal life. Amen.

Description:

The words of Christ are eternal and can be trusted. All other ways to God lead into blind alleys.

Tags:

Christ, Jesus, God, truth, trust, testing, belief, discernment, clarity, hope, love, turn, resolve, teaching, learning, faith