

"The Turning Point"

Texts: 1Kings 8:(11,6, 10-11) 22-30. 41-43
Ephesians 6:10-20 (Series B, 12th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 84
John 6:56-69

Let us pray:

Today's gospel reading concludes our series of readings from the sixth chapter of the gospel according to John. It marks a turning point in the response of the people to Jesus, it marks the point where most of the people who come out to see Him turn away from him, the point where even most of those who have followed him from the beginning, those who had considered themselves his disciples, abandon him.

Up to this point Jesus has been a popular man. He has been the hero of Galilee - the star from Bethlehem the miracle worker who saved a wedding by turning water into wine the healer who gave health the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years the wise man who is able to see into a woman's heart and bring her new hope the man so close to God that he is able to feed over 5000 men, women and children with only *five loaves* of bread and *two fish*.

But now - now after telling the people that all he has done is but a sign from God that they should believe in him, - now, after telling them that the *bread* and *fish* that he gave them to eat only will only satisfy temporary, but that his flesh and blood will satisfy them forever, that he is the bread of heaven God has prepared for them, they leave him.

And as they go from him as they abandon the one who gave them bread to eat, the one who healed their sick, and showed them the power of God - they say to one another and to themselves: "*This teaching is too difficult* - who can accept it?

Indeed, it is a difficult teaching to accept, this teaching that Jesus is the bread of heaven and that through him comes eternal life for all who believe in him, all who follow him. But is this the reason that crowds leave him? Is this the reason that most of his disciples depart from him?

Jesus said, in verse 26, after they had all followed him across the lake to Capernaum? *"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* Today I ask the question - what are you prepared to pay for it?

God is extraordinarily gracious and kind. He created us in his own image and bestowed this world upon us to care for and to cherish to enjoy. God has bestowed upon us as well a perfect freedom to do as we will –

- ❖ to love as we want to love,

- ❖ to live as we want to live, without interference - without restriction.

How God works is absolutely marvelous. God makes his sun rise on both evil and the good, God sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous, God cares for all that has made and gives everyone every chance that they need to get things right.

In return all God hopes is that we in fact do come to love Him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength and all our minds -- and to love our brothers and our sisters as we love ourselves. God loves us - God is committed to us - and in that commitment, in that love, God doesn't give up on us, not even when we give up on him, not even when we go our own way.

God has never abandoned his world or his people. God has always made it possible for us to approach him -- to be with him -- to enjoy him. Indeed, God gives - *freely - liberally* - and without asking much at all of us; only that we accept his gifts and try to follow in the path that he will show us -the way he has revealed to us in the law and the prophets and in his chosen one – Jesus Christ. When you and I consider the question of Peter in today's gospel reading, *"to whom else can we go?"*

I think we understand that there is earthly food - which never completely satisfies and that there is heavenly food that endures forever. And I think we want this heavenly food... but, sadly, all too often our want lacks something, all too often it lacks *passion*, and *conviction*, and will power to commit to the One true bread from heaven.

The reason for this – I think is that we are all too often not hungry enough, we haven't been really tested and tried and discovered that there is no answer within us or within our human wisdom and all too often it turns out that all we really want is a free lunch - a material lunch - bread and wine for today - good times without cost -and yes- if we can get it for the asking - we'll take that thing called eternal life as well.

And this is a problem - for us in this Church age:

- for those who think in worldly terms, and for many who are "believers"
- the kind of believers who believe with their minds, but not with their hearts
- those kind of people for whom faith is "*three impossible things before breakfast*" instead of a life of trust - a life lived in relationship with a real and personal God.

Too often we find people who have the words of faith well planted in the brains - but *no conviction, no passion, no commitment* in their hearts. They have the outward form of faith, but none of the substance - none of the power that comes with it. Some come to worship and leave without being fill with assurance...

Christ had an All or Nothing Message - A message about receiving life - or not receiving life through him. A message about commitment - the kind of commitment that does not compromise, but holds true for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health...

Some might say at this point - this is not fair; this is not good news. But think on it for a minute. There are absolutes in life - electrons have either a positive spin or a negative spin, circuits are either open or closed there is either light or no light statements are either true or false.

We are not called to be a people who follow Jesus only when it suits our taste, our understanding, or our desires. We are called to be with the Lord and to serve him - and to be blessed by him - in good times and hard times - in the times that are easy - and the times when it is not easy. (Coronavirus pandemic).

There is no respect ever shown in the scriptures for people who - when things aren't going in a way that suits them pack their marbles and go home - as did those in today's gospel reading.

In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John we see people who leave Jesus because they wanted free food - a free lunch - and not some vague sounding spiritual food that would do nothing for their hungry stomach.

Others leave Jesus - because they can not believe that God would send spiritual food through a person as plain as Jesus - through someone they knew and had grown up with.

To them - the spiritual could not be contained in the *irreverent* - in the *common* - in the *familiar* - but must always be accompanied by smoke and fire and lightening and thunder and other grand displays.

Still others left Jesus because they understood exactly what he was saying and they did not want God to get that close to them. They wanted to run their own lives -- rather than let God live and work through them.

Like so many today - they did not want to give control of their lives over to God because they think that God, for some reason, might ask them to do something they don't want to do. That is - until we want something from God? Until we are in a danger of our own making and hope to be rescued? Until we hope to get some favour!

Jesus asks us for a commitment; He asks us to be faithful to him as he is faithful to us - in the good times of our lives - as well as in the bad. In his asking Jesus does not compromise.

He does not water down his message so that it will be easier for us. He does not go chasing after the people who walk away from him as did the crowd at Capernaum. He does not change the truth so that his disciples will not leave him.

No - what Jesus does is proclaim what he came to proclaim, He comes to offer to us, as God has always offered us - *a choice*

* the choice to live with him - in his care and under his love,

* or to live without him and without the peace, the joy, and the strength that a relationship with him offers.

There is a sequel to our acts of commitment as well, our commitments to one another, and our commitment to God. When we stand firm, when we refuse to compromise, we reap the abundant harvest of righteousness - we reap a harvest of joy and peace that endures forever.

Those who confess that Jesus is the Holy One of God, those who realize, as Peter realized, that there is no one else to whom we can go, and who listen to the words of eternal life that Jesus speaks and walk in his way, will see his glory. They will witness Christ returning in the way he went -- on the clouds - and in triumph, and they will rejoice! Blessed be God - day by day.

And, finally, Jesus asks the Twelve if they *wish to go away* as did Joshua with the tribes of Israel... who you will serve. Peter says, *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.*

From those times to our times, we are still seeking to understand, to strengthen our faith, to travel the path to God in our own way and with each other. We struggle with questions and doubts and confidence in our faith. Let us strengthen ourselves to *come to believe and know* again and again that Jesus is our Redeemer Christ, *the Holy one of God*. Let us make the saving choice. **Amen.**

Let us pray: Eternal God, draw us together to clothe ourselves in Your whole armor, nourished by the holy food and drink of Christ. With Your helmet of salvation and shield of faith, we can resist all evil, as we seek to live forever in You. We ask through Christ Jesus, the Son of Man; and the Live-Giving Spirit, who together with You, reign as One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Wess Bourgaize, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen, the floods and fires in Europe, China, India and wild fires in parts of Canada and the USA, Earth quake in Haiti, the dire situation in Afghanistan & Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me # 767**
- **Beautiful Saviour # 838**
- **Christ is Made the Sure Foundation # 645**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Mehrnoosh (Mary) Shakiba

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