

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: John 6:60-69

“The Choice is Yours”

In the past few weeks with our readings from the Holy Gospel of John, we discovered that the people were wanting to make Jesus their king right away – they did not want to wait - because He had fed them – and they wanted more forever! Jesus tried to make it clear to them that this bread was not your everyday, run of the mill bread, but that this bread that He was talking about had a major condition – for it was His Body. Our Gospel reading today begins with these words: *“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?””* (John 6:60) A hard teaching? It think you could call it --- downright controversial – and it is to this day! You might be saying to yourself “on hearing what?” I want to address this right at the outset. Just think back to last week’s sermon. If you would please open your pew bibles to page 1658, and let us review John chapter 6, beginning with verse 53 – and look at a part of last week’s Gospel reading.

Jesus said to them, *“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”* (John 6:53-58) This is what the disciples were saying: *“This is a hard teaching.”* Jesus was telling them some very hard things to hear that were not even close to what they were used to hearing – from anyone – let alone the Son of Man.

And so we now look at Jesus’ response to them in verses 61-63: *“Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”* (John 6:61-63) John inserted an important note in the next verse, verse 64. *“For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.”* Just as God said the Joshua, *“choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”* (Joshua 24:15) Joshua replied, *“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”* (Joshua 25:15) Life is all about choices – and Jesus knows who will betray Him and choose to walk another path.

To those who have followed Jesus then, and follow Him today – we know that Jesus has continually given the opportunity to make life choices. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:16-18 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but*

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 22, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” The choices are pretty clear and they are to believe in Jesus or not! To live or not! Throughout all four Gospels - Jesus continually gives us more and more choices. Jesus give ALL people, not just Christians, not just Anglicans, not just Baptists, He gives ALL people – that means everybody!

Jesus gives all people the opportunity to make an important choice – one that will affect their lives forever. Jesus went on to say, *“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.” From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*” Some people will interpret this as ‘the elect.’ Every November, we go to a voting booth and we make choices. You made ‘elections.’ That is the ‘elect.’ The people who make the choice to follow Jesus. The ones who have felt on their hearts that God was calling them – but then you have to make the choice – the choice is yours! *“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”* The commitment was not real. It was kind of interesting to see what this man was doing, and if it didn’t line up with what you were looking for then – boom – you were gone. Remember that the term disciple means follower – which is more than just the Apostles. Jesus has an important question for them – the Twelve Apostles. Look at verse 67, Jesus asks them: *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* We know the choice they make – even Judas, but Simon Peter, the leader answers Jesus, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* The Holy One of God is saying that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. Our Gospel reading ends there – but Jesus has an answer for him and all of the twelve, *"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"* (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)” He knew that!

Let’s go back and look at what Jesus said a little earlier – as He was telling them *“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life.* I believe that Jesus is telling them that they need to come to terms with the fact that that the One who is right in front of them and speaking to them is equally at home in heaven and on earth. He is a citizen of both heaven and earth. He is the Word made flesh – God Incarnate. And so, doesn’t it make sense that this flesh, and this blood, are somehow miraculous vehicles of the inner life of the Word. The bread by itself, of course, would be irrelevant, as verse 63 says, but when the Holy Spirit comes upon it, the miracle takes place – and as we believe – it becomes the Real Presence of Christ. Last Sunday, I went through all of the different worship forms and Holy Communion in Christianity. (That is one reason why we, as Anglicans choose to worship this way – we believe that there is bread and wine at the table – but the Holy Spirit does something which we cannot explain) Trust me I have felt it – it is not these hands that do anything – it is the Holy Spirit. We choose to worship this way.

Jesus was urging those listening to Him, to go beyond their kind of one-dimensional understanding of what He did and said - and their desire to follow Jesus to get more free bread,

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 22, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

and to listen to the Holy Spirit, Who they would need to help them because without the Holy Spirit, they would remain in a state of unbelief. There is not one person on the face of this earth that can save a soul. You can introduce them to Christ and then you need to get out of the way! Be as good a Christian as you can, as an example for them, but let the Holy Spirit do the work. I shudder when I hear people say “well, I saved three people today!” No, you can’t save anybody, but you can introduce them to the One who can – Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Our Savior – the Messiah. He is the One who is not only speaking about God’s Kingdom here on earth, but also His Kingdom to come – as we pray in the Lord’s prayer, which He is already bringing into existence. The Twelve Apostles believe in Him and told Him that ‘*You have the words of eternal life.*’ Jesus knows that one of them will turn traitor, he will sell Jesus out and, worse than traitor, become an ‘accuser’ which ties in closely with the ‘devil.’ For right now, the Twelve stand as representatives of the faith, the belief, that Jesus has been looking for: the recognition that in Him, His words, and His works, that God was at last bringing about the new Exodus, the great movement that would set the whole world free from sin and death –all because Jesus made the choice to take our place, and our punishment – on the cross. He has not left us alone, He has left us the gift of His Body and Blood which we can partake here in church, and He has left us His Holy Spirit to lead, guide and inspire us.

You have heard me say this before – “when you look in the rear-view mirror of your life – you can see God’s fingerprints all over everything!” Thank Him for all of the good things that He has done in your life – and for all of the things that He will yet do for you. To Him be the honor, and the Glory, and the choice is yours.