

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 26, 2018, Liturgical Year "B"

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 6:60-69

***"Life Is All About Choices"***

Wow! I never dreamed - it is a privilege and an honor to be standing in this pulpit today, and I pray, the first of many sermons that will be preached of God's Word here at St. Andrew's and continue to preach God's Word here at St. Andrew's.

There is an old saying by Baseball Hall of Famer Yogi Berra who said: "When you get to the fork in the road – take it!" You know what Yogi was right! Life is all about choices – and depending on the choices you make - they will decide so much in your life.

Since the beginning of humanity – we have had the privilege and the burden of making our own choices. Adam and Eve made their choice of disobeying a simple request and it got deeper and deeper from there. Noah could have said no to God's command to build for him an ark. Abraham and Sarah wrongly decided not to wait for "the child of promise" and Ishmael was born. Joseph could have remained in prison when he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife – but he offered to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. Moses could have stayed in hiding, ignoring the words from the Burning Bush and not gone to Pharaoh, demanding him to free the Hebrews. I could go on and on and on – and you can only imagine what would have happened to human history. But knowing the character of Almighty God, I would imagine that God would have chosen others to bring the good from all the bad choices – but we will never know.

As we discovered in the past few weeks in the Holy Gospel - John's Gospel, that the people were wanting to make Jesus their king right now –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) Wait a minute – on hearing it? Hearing WHAT? In order to wrap our minds around this we need to look at what Jesus had just said – words that we heard in last week's Holy Gospel. If you would open your pew bibles to page 1658, John chapter 6, beginning with verse 53.

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) Jesus was telling them some very hard things to hear that was not close to what they were used to hearing – from anyone.

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 26, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

Jesus’ response to them was very telling: “*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 writes a narrative 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.*” Once again, we are seeing that life is all about choices – and Jesus knows who will betray Him and knows who will choose to walk another path.

To those who have followed Jesus then, and follow Him today – we know that Jesus has continually given them 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 whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.***” Could it be more clear? The choices here are to believe in Him or not! To live or not! Throughout the Gospels Jesus continually gives more choices.

That day in Capernaum, Jesus gives them all 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.*” We need to remember that the term disciple means follower – not 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 like saying 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 speaking to them is equally at home in heaven and on earth. He is a citizen of both. He is, after all, 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. (That is one reason why we, as Anglicans chose to worship this way.)

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 26, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

Jesus is urging those listening to Him, to go beyond a one-dimensional understanding of what He is doing and saying - and their spoken desire to follow Jesus to get more free bread, but to listen to the Holy Spirit within “His flesh.” For this, they are going to need the Holy Spirit to help them. Without that, they will 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 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 save three people today!” Uh Uh! 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, and, worse than traitor, become an ‘accuser’ which ties in closely with the ‘devil.’ For the 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.

In closing, as I said earlier, life is all about choices. Just think about your life and the choices that you have made. Was God involved? Did you invite Him in before you made that decision – any decision? I like to say – and 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!” That three-word prayer is what I am talking about – “**help me Jesus.**” Invite Him into the choices and the decisions – and don’t forget to thank Him with the other “**thank you Jesus.**” To Him be the honor, and the Glory