

Sermon 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021.

John 6:56-69. CCO & St. John's Newsholme

I was watching the emergency recalling of parliament this week, listening to the discussions, debates that have resulted in response to the crisis of what has happened in Afghanistan. If you avoid watching the news or reading any newspapers, then you may not even know what has happened in Afghanistan.

Or you may have heard but see it as not relevant or affecting us, a separate issue. Either way, I'm sure you would agree that decisions made here in our country and the subsequent actions and results of them are relevant on a global scale and accountable for, for many years to come, whether we take an interest in them or not. We could try our best to keep challenging and complex news or difficult truths and their future ramifications off our radar. Many of Jesus' followers certainly gave up on him after realising he wasn't a Moses or taught truths that were very different to who they wanted him to be.

It really struck me whilst watching parliament and all that was said, that I didn't just go my own way but included Jesus in it and thought where would he fit into this and what does he have to say, to them, to me? To us?

It really struck me that to have faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God, sent as flesh to teach us, to redeem us from our sins, and to believe that the communion of Jesus' kind of bread of life, is to accept God's offer of eternal life and love for us. Then I had to admit the vastness of God's offer that it means Jesus resides in every single parliament, every situation, every nation, every heart who seeks belief. God so loved the world.

He is the epitome of being global, relevant in every aspect of a global earth and every single one of its inhabitants! That is a vast relevance isn't it! And a challenging one to us.

No wonder many can't take in the vast relevance of Jesus today, in all things, globally and heavenly when what we read of him is thousands of years old, in a different context, in lower population and smaller area, in a culture we struggle to relate to. There are many barriers and excuses to not trust or believe God's vastness and love for us, let alone of the whole world.

Do we reduce Jesus to only residing here, on that much smaller scale? Is our only knowledge and experience of him reduced to ancient stories of his teachings, miracles, his life and death as have been put together in our New Testament, in today's reading?

Well for many today, including myself, the answer would be "no" he doesn't only reside there, because we are still here in communion, eating of Jesus' eternal heavenly bread, spiritual food, the bread of life for the world! We are here in fellowship, prayer, worship, faith, strength, belief, and trust, even against all the odds! He exceeds his biblical context, beyond his time as a man, way above and beyond any expectations in popularity, trust, or faith that he still exudes in people. In us. Here. Globally. Eternally.

The Greek word for 'offend' is where we get our word 'scandalise'. We read that Jesus' teaching has offended his disciples. We know that following Jesus' teaching, to be a disciple of his got far too difficult and challenging for many and so many stopped following him. In our reading today he is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum and so to those who haven't left him but are still following.

After years of being told exactly what not to do in consuming blood and what was and wasn't offensive to God, and how blood was to be used for atonement at altars (as we read in Leviticus 17:10-11), it was now scandalous what Jesus was trying to teach them.

The imagery of cannibalism and blasphemy was offensive and just too difficult to take that Jesus was telling people to eat his flesh and drink his blood. (6:56).

Because of the complaining and grumbling that this difficult teaching resulted in, Jesus asks straight out 'does this offend you?' And because many had stopped following him, he also asked the 12 disciples 'do you also wish to go away?'

This is quite challenging to us because we grumble and complain today if Jesus' teaching is too difficult to understand or not what we want to be called to do or hear. We have to admit that we often feel like we want to answer 'yes'.

Simon Peter's answer in verse 68 when he answers 'Lord, to whom can we go?' reminds us why the relevance of faith in Jesus prevails. Why we still hear and see him in lives. In verse 69 Peter says 'we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Following Jesus still challenges, is still tough to follow. He doesn't say what we always want to hear, he doesn't make it easy for us because he challenges us to be better and to do better.

So, do we also wish to go away when following Jesus becomes too difficult? If so, to whom can we go from here? Who else could take Jesus' place in our lives once we have decided to get to know him ourselves and have seen him reside in the lives of so many others?

Peter's words make even more sense when we suffer the loss of a loved one. I have attended a funeral this week and this is where knowing and trusting in Jesus' life-giving spirit, abiding in him, and him in us which never ends, offers us peace and hope. As we physically miss our loved ones, yet we live in hope and faithful trust that they have begun new life with him. 'It is the spirit that gives life' as it says in verse 63.

The Greek word *pisteuo* appears more than 80 times in John and it translates as to 'believe' and to trust or rely on someone. In John's gospel it isn't the complaining that is the issue but the not believing, the not trusting in God.

We can take comfort that Jesus' closest disciples had questions, had doubts, found parables hard to understand. Because it reminds us of the vastness of God and how much, just like we do today, we need to continue to know him and trust in him through our sharing of our experiences of faith. How we may have grown in understanding him as the bread of life.

It is difficult to remain trusting in God providing for us when we only display a recognition of him when he performs miracles for us, rather than seeing him in all aspects, as he calls us to a life changing and lifelong discipleship.

Just like the early disciples, are we to be offended by Jesus' difficult call or to be believers and followers no matter what?

Just like the early disciples, we are to work hard on bridging that obvious disconnection between God's ways and our own ways.

Let us pray

Father God, Son and Holy Spirit as one in our lives, help us to hear your spiritual calling to us in recognition of you as food for the world. Help us to be ready for the difficult truths and responsibilities you may say to us, and ask of us, as we seek to be more shaped like you Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen