

## St James' Church, Weybridge

### Trinity 13 (Proper 16) Yr B – Sermon Notes

*“Simon Peter answered, ‘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.’”* (John 6:67-69)

Have you ever felt ‘out in the cold’ or ‘alone?’ Hopefully at those times your everyday faith has helped you.

Today’s Gospel reading continues John’s telling of Jesus teaching about the Eucharist and our Lord’s apparent “wilderness moment”. It comes at the conclusion of a controversial chapter in which Jesus feeds the 5 thousand; then the crowd want him to be king (Free food was on offer!) but He refuses. They follow Jesus to Capernaum where He teaches that He is the bread of life who ‘came down from heaven’, and those who consume His flesh and blood, will live for ever! Yikes!

Those who don’t agree with Him give up on following Him then and there – it is all too much. Where is their everyday faith in the face of challenge? Where would you be in this story of great challenge and change? It’s not hard to imagine that we would be like some and question Jesus and his priorities. Would we walk away?

Remember that Jesus knows people’s inner thoughts – the depths of heart intentions. Our Lord’s response to their concern is deliberate as He speaks of himself as the Son of Man, *“ascending to where He was before”*. Jesus can rely upon the 12 definite loyal team! But where are the 55k He started off with at the beginning of the chapter? Even one of the 12 would go on to betray Him, leading to the denial of Peter and the greatest wilderness moment for Jesus, when he is hung naked, upon the cross of suffering and shame, when most flee. A truly alone moment for *God with us*.

Before this happens, Jesus teaches them about His inclusive love. But are they listening? Perhaps not, as Jesus tells the crowd, *“You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves”* (John 6:26). Ouch. Jesus recognises that He had become, for the crowd, a phenomenon, who offered free food! But Jesus is not a celebrity or showman.

The loaves and fishes were timely sustenance for those who ate them, and had symbolic significance, but even they could be a distraction if the people took them only at face value. For Jesus, the loaves and fish are sacramental, they speak of what is going on spiritually within people as the Lord of life and love connects the hearts of His disciples into the Trinity of love – communion.

So, Jesus builds on the theme of eating but speaks of eating his flesh – His self-sacrifice. The Eucharist that we celebrate today proclaims the same message and it is serious and profound, connecting us to the Trinity of love today, and one another. But Jesus knows that only committed disciples will work for this spiritual food, that the crowd will disperse, that not everyone will want to hear, to follow, to love and to know God’s blessing in and through their lives.

Today we know it is not always easy to be a Christian and follow Jesus – nothing in that sense has changed, even if day to day life is much safer now than it was in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.

So back then Jesus is left with the twelve, who are in it for the long haul. It is Peter speaks the most wonderful words for them all, saying, *“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.*” (John 6:67-69) This is the kind of disciple Jesus wants: one committed to him personally, not just taking advantage of his extraordinary powers. But did Peter fully understand Jesus’ teaching better than the others? Perhaps not, as his later denial of Christ three times would suggest. But even in the face of this rejection, Jesus never stops loving people into relationship and after his resurrection calls Peter to serve and lead: *“Do you love me more than these?”* Peter replies, *“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”* Jesus responds, *“Feed my lambs.”* Then, *“Tend my sheep.”* And *“Feed my sheep.”* (John 21: 15-17) Three times.

In today’s Gospel, a moment when so many deserted Jesus, the nucleus of his Church is there, building foundations for the future, a Church that would sing his praise for 2 millennia and many more to come. A church which for nearly 1000 years has been here in Weybridge, gathering to break the bread, share the cup and follow Jesus as his disciples, with all our various gifts, talents and abilities.

Yes, sometimes with doubts and fears, but inclusive and loving, outward looking and faithful, a church that gathers week by week to break the bread and share the cup – His Body and His Blood, when Jesus is made known today – now.

As the body of Christ today, we need to ask whether our outreach and Christian nurture present a rigorous enough model of Christian living and community? Do we demonstrate our faith every day, as Jesus first followers were called to do, sacramentally? Do we truly mirror our inclusive values where all are welcome, including noisy children – not just at the door with a smile, or in the church pews, but in our thoughts, words and actions?

We know that our society is inherently spiritual – there is a real demand for genuine faith, so what are we doing to reach people where they are and offer them the words of eternal life?

For Peter’s confession reminds us that God wants disciples who are not just committed to an idea or ideology but to the person of Jesus, the Holy One of God – people who live out their faith every day! And to help us with that the Church of England have developed a really helpful App for our phones, Everyday Faith. Including daily bible readings, reflections, and prayer to inspire us in our faith journey.

*“Lord, to whom can we go”* exclaims Peter, *“You have the words of eternal life.”* May we, like Peter look to Christ, the Holy One of God, the pioneer of our faith and pledge a new to serve him in His Church, demonstrating His inclusive love for all, in our everyday faith. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, August 2024.