

Joshua 24:1-2a,14-18

Psalm 34:15-22

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

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Choose and Abide

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Think of the courage it took for Jesus when he realized many of his disciples had “turned back and no longer went about with him” to pose this question to those who remained:

“Do you also wish to go away?”

It took courage because the question essentially was, “Do you still love me?” It’s the hardest question there is to ask someone-- because of the risk and vulnerability that comes with it. “Do you still love me or are you ready to call it quits?”

Jesus had staked everything he had on these disciples, this hardscrabble group of misfits he’d asked to do something that was both preposterous --- and utterly without precedent --- which also meant giving up everything they’d ever known. God’s kingdom was dead if no one carried it forward. Jesus, more than anyone, understood that truth.

Jesus continually poured love born from courage into his disciples and followers. And yet it wasn’t always enough.

“Eat my flesh and drink my blood” conjures up a gruesome image then and now. I recoil every time I read or hear them. And some scholarship suggests they were tamed from the original Greek in which the actual words were closer to “chomp” and “guzzle” which stripped them from their shock value. But shock might well have been Jesus’ intent all along.

Rev. Shannon Kerschner suggests what Jesus wants to do is “shock us into paying deeper attention, to grab us, to become a part of the whole of who we are in order to make us into whole new human beings. That is what discipleship is about. That is what Jesus is about.”¹

¹Kerschner, Shannon, Rev. Fourth Presbyterian Church sermon, August 15th, 2015

But along with that challenge Jesus is also offering us *intimacy*. Yes, discipleship is hard which the cross screams. But we are also promised the intimacy of *abiding* in him, a word wrapped in the grace of God's eternal love. Abide with me -- and in me --- becoming one with and God for eternity.

But what does eternal life mean when you are barely getting by in the life you already have? When you're trying to feed your family on the catch of the day, the flocks you tend, or the crops you raise for your servant master?

I'm betting it doesn't mean a whole lot. Looking for power, survival, and freedom from oppression, the disciples and Jesus's followers were given love, the grace of miracles, and the excruciating work of discipleship.

These past five weeks --"the bread discourses" -- begin with the feeding of the 5,000. However it happened, it was a spectacular miracle. Jesus tried to get away from the crowd that, seeing his power, wanted to make him a king; he and the disciples fled. The crowd eventually tracked them down and there were more teachings about food that perishes and the bread of eternal life, but that was a harder sell.

"Many of the disciples" chose to depart.

As they said, "these are hard teachings."

Writes the retired Methodist Bishop William Willimon:

Today's incarnational gospel reminds us that Jesus intends to have all of us, body and soul. His truth wants to burrow deep within us, to consume us as we consume him, to flow through our veins, to be digested, to nourish every nook and cranny of our being.²

But we have to choose. The stakes are high. We have to choose where we abide and we ratify that choice every day of our lives in ways large and small if we dare.

We are given the freedom to choose. We all have love to give away, love to pour into someone or a cause that serves others. Love comes with the risk that it may be rejected, which Jesus knew as he heard the scalding words, "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

As each of you know, our nation is on the precipice of choice; in 70 some days when we choose where this country will abide for the next four years.

²Willimon, William, commentary in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3* edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor

The exhilaration many of us felt in watching the convention in Chicago will fade, leaving us with the choice of how hard we will work to stand up for the truths and values that bind us together rather than the fears and hatred with the power tear us further apart.

Here at St. Martin's, we see Jesus in the stained glass above the high altar walking toward us with the chalice. This centers my soul in the peace, mystery, and power of what we are given over and over in the Eucharistic feast. It is a wellspring of hope for me-- An invitation to abide in the liberating, life-giving love of Jesus and then to act on it: For as we pray every week:

Send us now into the world in peace and grant us strength and courage to love and *serve* you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord.”

May it be so.

Amen