

Worship Outline including Reflection for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Opening Verse of Scripture Ephesians 6.10-11

‘Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’

Collect: Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who called your Church to bear witness that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself: help us to proclaim the good news of your love, that all who hear it may be drawn to you; through him who was lifted up on the cross, and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First Reading: Joshua 24.1–2a, 14–18

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ‘Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.’

Then the people answered, ‘Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.’

Second Reading: Ephesians 6.10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to

quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Gospel Reading: John 6.56-69

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, '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.'

Reflection

"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

There is a wonderful parallel between the Old Testament and Holy Gospel readings this weekend. Joshua has succeeded Moses and has led the tribes of Israel into the Promise Land. We are at the end of the Book of Joshua, and he has called the tribes together to renew their covenant with God. Joshua stood before the tribes of Israel; reminded them of the wonderful feats of deliverance and miracles God had performed on their way to the Promise Land. Then he asked them to make a choice between the false gods or the God their ancestors served "... who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, out of the state of slavery."

For the Israelites it was crunch time! In the Gospel reading we are brought to another such time of choice. The last of 5 weeks in church we have read Chapter

6 of the Gospel of John. Beginning with the sign of the feeding of 5,000 men plus an unknown number of women and children, the whole Chapter has used bread as an extended metaphor to describe what it is that Jesus is offering and the relationship which Jesus wants us to have with him. Now Jesus is presenting his followers with a 'Make your mind up time!' It is now that we discover just how tough the message of Jesus was for some who followed him. They have a real crisis of faith and even if it is hard to believe with hindsight, many of them, in fact almost all of them, walked away!

So far following Jesus has been easy and exciting - he has been performing signs and wonders, successfully challenging the authorities, and raising hopes that "this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." (John 6:14) But now the message of Jesus has become much more threatening, he speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. There is going to be more to following this Jesus than simply wandering around the countryside eating free dinners. Jesus is asking for a completely different level of commitment, "flesh and blood".

It should come as no surprise to us that some were disappointed with Jesus and melted away when they discovered that his kingdom was not of this world. We read that "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" It is important to remind ourselves that we should expect that not everybody is cut out for the business of following Jesus. Sometimes we are so eager to make the Gospel message understandable and acceptable that we tone down the really difficult stuff.

It is understandable that we do not want to put people off, however the Gospel is challenging, demanding and asks difficult questions of us. We need to be very cautious about producing a 'Gospel for all' and reducing Jesus to a very nice man. Following Jesus means that we must be prepared to choose our priorities and Jesus is not satisfied with half measures. Simon Peter makes a declaration of his devotion to Jesus, similar to that in Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, and Luke 9:18-21. He tells Jesus "You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Today Jesus is calling for full commitment and we have to consider which side we are on. The response of Simon Peter was, "Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." What is your response 2000 years later? Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

God our creator, you feed your children with the true manna, the living bread from heaven: let this holy food sustain us through our earthly pilgrimage until we come to that place where hunger and thirst are no more; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.