

Difficult Sayings/Difficult Doing Pentecost 12/Proper 16

The Bible abounds with hard sayings. It is easy for me to conclude that the Church was not meant to be comfortable with God's word. When God's people (the church) find themselves confronted with a death order "to take up your cross" or the order "whoever does not hate mother, brother, sister for my sake cannot be my disciple," there are heads that get scratched. Why is God being so unreasonable? After all, we are only volunteers!

That great American writer, Mark Twain, wrote: "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scriptures which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always notice that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand."

I suspect that, at times, we all would like to walk away from the church and never come back. We want a God different from the one we find in Jesus.

Flesh and blood? Yes. But demanding? No. Resurrected? Yes. But crucified? No. Salvation? Yes. Repentance? No. Love? Yes. Commitment? No. We are only volunteers.

Being a volunteer himself, Jesus and the disciples, also volunteers, face a reality that is both harsh and seemingly conflicted. In last Sunday's gospel Jesus says 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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." These verses by themselves are ludicrous. They were and are yet misunderstood. The empire considered Christians cannibals by reason of these words. The powers that were never understood the rest of the story.

On the other hand, there is the modern ethical dilemma of dealing with non-Christian religions with respect given the audacity of making statements like this that obviously exclude them. Though most religions break bread in some form of ceremony none other than the Christian Church do it in memory of Jesus' death and resurrection. Do our Jewish and Muslim friends not have eternal life?

What's more difficult for us to accept is that Jesus' words are purposefully offensive. He is confronting the unbelief around him. Even though some will witness his ascension into heaven, they will

not believe Jesus as the Holy One of God. Later in Matthew chapter 28 that unbelief is confirmed.

Friends, we are not left with many options as to what the words of Jesus say. Being a good Jew and a rabbi Jesus would never advocate cannibalism. The book of Leviticus forbade such practice as eating blood (17 and 19). Nor would he advocate hating parents when the law demanded God's people to revere them. Is there one standard for Jews and another for Christians? If so, how could there be one God?

Jesus asks questions pertinent for us. Are we his modern disciples offended by his words? Are we willing to stick it out with him when he says there is one way to eternal life? Are we able to trust God that he will bring to Jesus everyone that should? Many left Jesus employment that day and no longer followed. As volunteers it was their choice.

Some have made it their choice not to be a regular part of this parish family. Some have left all together. Despite efforts to call on them their absence leads me to conclude that if it happened to Jesus it will happen to his Church. The servant is not greater than the master. Those once among us are not necessarily against us. We pray that they will have their needs met among God's other sheep.

Be assured that some will leave because of misunderstanding. Our mission and responsibility is to reconcile those when we have failed. Yet, one needs never to apologize for faith in Christ's teaching or for the mission chosen by our parish. That includes the giving away of gifts that God has given to his people by his people for ministry. That ministry includes funds that were designated long ago for outreach to meet human needs outside of our membership in the community we live. We are stewards of those funds and we will be accountable to God and Mr. Eggleston on judgment day.

Once again Trinity Church will take the lead in meeting human needs, ending human suffering and promoting eternal life by the words of life given by Christ. We look to God the Holy Spirit to lead us in paths of righteousness for his name sake even when it is difficult for some. I pray we can dialogue when we disagree. I pray we can be reasonable and find a common path to walk. From time to time the question may be discussed, "Do you also wish to go away?" May we reply with Peter who asks, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of life."

My prayer is that we can go to Christ because we love him and his words and we love one another. A beautiful place of worship, though a good thing, is not enough to give us life or keep us together. The stones built by former members into this building are as dead as they are. They do not give life only God can. As beautiful as the Temple in Jerusalem was in the day of the Lord Jesus it was destroyed and the Jewish faith was transformed forever by it. May the Lord who loved us and gave himself for his church be our "flesh and our blood." May we go to him who feeds us with words of eternal life. Amen