

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018  
Trinity 13 YrB

## This is difficult teaching; who can accept it?

For the past couple of weeks we have been slowly walking through the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of John. We have heard how Jesus fed 5000 with five barley loaves and two small fish offered by a young boy who was part of the crowd. We didn't hear, which is a shame, how Jesus then walked on water, we continued instead, in an attempt by the lectionary writers no doubt to maintain some theological unity, with Jesus' teaching about his relationship to the people of faith and the God whom we are encouraged to call Abba, Father.

In this teaching we first had Jesus tell the people, when the people who have not understood what has happened before them ask for a miraculous sign, he is the bread of life. That through him all life has meaning and in this understanding of life the food becomes the eucharistic gifts of bread and wine. The spiritual food through which life everlasting is available. And if we are unclear about this life everlasting it is a relationship with God that is real and profound, achieved by fully receiving Jesus Christ into the very essence of our lives. This eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood is to fully receive Jesus into ourselves; to understand salvation as being more than a set of new clothes. Salvation becomes a new life in which we are reborn, made new and whole, we are made complete in our relationship with God. A new relationship with creation which we celebrate in the broken bread and poured out wine of the Eucharist.

Now this all sounds fine and dandy doesn't it? For some it doesn't. Earlier in this chapter the Jewish leaders were scandalised. Jesus' teaching seems to be contrary to the teaching of the Torah. He is seen as taking authority for himself and suggesting he is the bread from heaven rather than the manna that fed the Israelites in the mighty sojourn. And how can this guy be from heaven when they knew his parents and family? It all got a bit much. Then in this last pericope even those who claim to follow him struggle.

This probably happened, and not just once either. Ever wondered why it seems so few disciples were with Jesus at the last supper? And why, if there were so many followers there were none to protect Jesus at his arrest? Interesting questions, ones that probably show following Jesus wasn't easy. On this occasion the writer of John is

writing to and for the community of which he was part and those within that community unable to grasp the reality of these heavenly truths. Grasping the spiritual nature of Jesus' words and the power which they conveyed of God's interaction with God's people, in the power of the Holy Spirit through God's Son, the Messiah. Jesus' words point to a Messiah that will not bring glory to the world and the freedom of the people of Israel from Roman oppression but shame and sorrow to his followers.

But then here, as with the Eucharist, we are pointed to a time and place beyond earthly expectations, beyond the sorrow of the torn flesh and spilt blood of Jesus' raising up. John points to the ascension, to the Christ sitting at the right hand of God, a process which for him has already begun in this gospel story; and not only for Jesus himself but for all who hear his word and follow him. We are told, the words of Jesus are "spirit and life". Up until now when referring to flesh and blood Jesus has been referring to the spiritual food which draws us into Jesus and Jesus into us, opening for us the way to salvation that is to be in the full presence of God. The 'flesh' in this passage of John's gospel changes. This is now the flesh that is useless, referring to our inability to save ourselves. Salvation comes from God only, through Jesus who is the Christ. John reminds us of our own frailty and personal inconsequence, whilst reminding us of the awesome power of God. so, Jesus recognises there are some among his disciples who do not believe.

Where then does this passage from John leave us? John reminds us that we are human, we are imperfect, we are broken. John tells us it is through receiving Jesus into our lives, in our humanity, we are made whole, we are healed. We receive Jesus every time we turn to him in truth and love. As we come to the altar we do so as those with open hands as those who came to Jesus at the feeding of the 5000; with hope and expectation; in vulnerability and incompleteness.

As we receive Jesus in the broken bread and outpoured wine of the Eucharist at this table we receive the grace of God, whose healing love and power are just waiting to be taken. This is God's work not ours. That is why his Son our Saviour Jesus had to come and tell us, show us as he is lifted high how much God loves us. And our task? To be in that garden on Easter morning, to know the risen and ascended Lord for ourselves. To not turn away as those who said his message was too hard. Instead to be prepared to stand firm and proclaim Jesus as your saviour in the face of a world that would have us say otherwise.