

The Wymersley Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton  
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

**Sermon 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021, Twelfth Sunday after Trinity**

Reading: John 6 56-69

Rev'd Irene Cobby

Being a Priest in the church of England is a joy that I never anticipated, however, with the joy comes a great deal of responsibility, none more so than in preaching from the words of the Gospel, some of which are easier to comprehend than others. Today's account is challenging, but I'll start with words from Paul's letter to the Ephesians which give precise instructions, not only to Priests, but to all of us:

1. Proclaim the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ at all times.
2. Strive to live a righteous life.
3. Be agents of peace and reconciliation in the world.
4. Have faith in our Lord, believing that God is with us and for us.
5. Believe and value our salvation
6. Let the Holy Spirit guide us and take control of our lives.
7. Pray in the Spirit at all times.

If we follow these instructions, says Paul, we will be alert and spiritually prepared to resist the temptations of the world. He doesn't say it will be easy, rather it will take effort to succeed, but Jesus will give us the strength we need.

Our Gospel reading today is another one in the series about Jesus - the bread of life who by our faith, feeds and sustain us in our life's journey. The disciples had been on a roller coaster ride of emotions as Jesus was doing all kinds of miracles, walking on water, healing people and feeding thousands using a boys' lunch to make enough food to feed a multitude of hungry people, with spare left over at the end. Yet in what we've heard today, Jesus seems determined to drive away as many followers as possible as he says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him". What's more, he seems goes on to criticise their proud heritage when he says, "Your forefathers ate manna yet died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." The Jewish nation were taught that eating human flesh and drinking human blood runs counter to their religious thinking and would certainly not be tolerated; they were the chosen people who had experienced God's provision in the desert, why now was Jesus speaking of eating his flesh and drinking his blood? This passage is tough to explain and tough to interpret and, not for the first time do we see that the leaders and many of the crowd, fail to understand exactly what Jesus is talking about.

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They take his words at face value and fail to see that Jesus is again using a metaphor to make his point of describing the real union that must take place if people want to truly be his disciples. Jesus is challenging the crowds who follow him to think beyond themselves. He wants more from them than chasing after him to see what's in it for them, or what the next "big thing" will be. A healing here, an elimination of evil spirits there or a feeding of thousands from next to nothing!

At this point in his ministry, Jesus wants to weed out the curious and the self-centred from those who really want to commit to his unique claims and the uncompromising truth that salvation comes from God alone. They craved a Messiah, a Saviour, well here I am, says Jesus, listen to me and take what I say seriously - It's make your mind up time!

When Jesus speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is not speaking of cannibalism, he is speaking about total commitment. He offers everything he has to us, and he wants everything we have in return, our full focus, not just a few moments out of our otherwise busy lives. Unfortunately, a lot of people can't or won't make that commitment, they didn't in Jesus' day, they just walked away, and they don't today.

Are we any different? Look around you, both inside the church and outside. There are those who say "Church doesn't do anything for me" or Church doesn't meet my needs, or (as someone told me last week) "I haven't got time for God". Church is all about what they can get out of it, what it does for them, with little or no thought about what they can do for church, or more important, what they can do for God, the God who created them and loves them, even though he gets nothing in return.

Yet there are many of us who like the disciples, stick with Jesus even when it's hard to understand his message because, as Peter said "where else could we go"? We know Jesus is the only one who speaks the words of life and hope. Where else can WE go?

There is only one way to follow Jesus Christ, and that is with total commitment with all your heart. So don't just come to church out of habit, don't just take everything God offers, but offer yourself in glory to him and to others around you. Strive to live as the Ephesians were encouraged to live. Keep Jesus at the heart of who you are and what you do, and let the Holy Spirit guide you on your way. Amen