

St Philip and St James Anglican Church

Palma de Mallorca Spain

8th August 2021

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Theme: Jesus is the Center of our Salvation

Text: John 6: 35, 41-51

Introduction

Today we are continuing with the Gospel of John and Jesus' Christological claim in the famous 'I am' sayings. Today's gospel is one of the wonderful eleven 'I am' sayings recorded in the gospel of John. Remember we are still on the metaphor of bread which started a fortnight ago and will continue to next week. For that metaphor to be meaningful, one needs to understand the significance of bread as a staple food in the Ancient Israelite Society. It is just like the significance of *sadza and stew* in Zimbabwe, *rice, yam, beans, and garri* in Nigeria, *fish and chips, Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding* in England. I hope I am whetting your appetite for food.

Exegesis of the Text

Our gospel reading opens with the last verse of last week's reading and then jumps six verses to verse 41. This is not an error by our liturgists and there is a purpose for that design. Verse 35 is included to make the necessary connection back to Jesus' claim that he himself is the bread of life. Jesus has just fed five thousand people (vv. 1-15), but the crowd failed to see the

significance of the miracle and cared only for the free lunch. Jesus has offered to meet their deepest needs, but they cannot see beyond their bellies. The rest of today's text acts as an explanation of that claim. Their complaint in verse 42 focuses on the difficulty caused by their own presumed knowledge of Jesus. They conclude that he has not come from Heaven, because they know his parents. It is true that knowing one's parents is certainly one way of providing identification. One who has been among them cannot possibly be what Jesus claims to be. There is theological irony at play here. The crowd's professed knowledge of Jesus' "father and mother" only reveals their complete ignorance of the Father who sent Jesus (verse 44). A poor, lowly, and suffering Messiah was an offence to them. Their pride refused to believe that such a humble man was sent from God. St Augustine once commented that "they had weak jaws of the heart, the mere deaf with open ears; they saw and stood blind not recognizing that what God gives is not what we make of things of ourselves." Well, there is nothing surprising in the behaviour of the audience; it is human nature showing itself in its true colours. The truth is not found in knowing the human parents who have nurtured Jesus' childhood. Rather, the truth is found in knowing that Jesus has come from the Father in Heaven. The crowd's self-assured "knowledge" stands in their way of seeing the truth. We suffer from the same difficulty of seeing beyond what we "know" to be true so that we might see the divine Truth among us.

Application

The only way out of such deadly unbelief is to be drawn into faith by the Father, and this activity of the Father is a major focus of today's text. Faith is not simply a human choice to be made, but is the activity of the Father drawing people to Jesus. The word used in verse 44 is the same word used to describe fishing nets being hauled into the boat (21:6). We must be dragged into faith by God; there is no other way to come. But what does that say about the complainers in this text? Now remember these are the same people that Jesus fed with the 5 loaves & 2 small fish & afterward they wanted to make Him their king by force. Then they sought for Him the next day because they were hungry. But Jesus sought to take them from the material real to the spiritual realm. From the bread that they had eaten to the true bread which God has given to the people that if they eat it they will never hunger again (v.35). The comparison continues between the manna of the law and Jesus, the true bread from heaven. It is no longer the law that produces life but the bread from heaven. So here & throughout the Gospel of John, everlasting life is directly related to your believing in Jesus Christ. Four times in this chapter Jesus relates everlasting life to believing in Him. The word "believe" is used around 99 times in the Gospel of John. In the next verse, Jesus refers to scripture and states it positively: "All who heard from the Father and learned from what they heard will come to me." Here, the teaching from God and the learning from that teaching will result in coming to Jesus. Different church contexts have different understandings of what it means "to come to Jesus." For example, in the Anglican Church sacraments are central in defining one's coming to Jesus.

John's own context and community had different layers of meaning for this also. It may be important to invoke some of the options. For the Jews in Jesus' context, it would be to choose the messianic understanding of their own tradition. For the Jews in the context of the Gospel of John, it would mean choosing to step outside the Jewish tradition and moving into the Christian context. In today's context, it might mean moving outside the typical pattern of our own culture and choosing a radical Christian understanding of the world. Whatever this choice involves, Jesus is clear that it can not happen individually. It is dependent upon God's beckoning, the Father's instruction, and the disciple's learning. One cannot come to Jesus on one's own. We need to be dragged by God Himself through His son Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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