

St Andrew's at Puerto Pollensa

Palma de Mallorca Spain

22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

**Theme: Abiding in Jesus**

**Text: John 6: 56-69**

### **Introduction**

**In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Today is the twelfth Sunday after trinity and this is the last of 5 weeks devoted to chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. The chapter begun 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 both: what it is that Jesus is offering; and, what is the relationship Jesus wants us to have with him. For the fifth Sunday in a row we find ourselves in John 6, but as this long account comes to its end, there are some disturbing surprises. As has been Jesus' habit throughout this conversation, he meets**

**objections by sharpening the point of his message, raising the offense rather than softening it, and thereby bringing the conversation to a crisis. Earlier in John 6, a large crowd wanted to make Jesus king after he miraculously satisfied their physical hunger. Now, in verses 56-69, many people stop following him because they do not agree with his teachings. Whether or not the two episodes involve the same people, they demonstrate a common human behavioral pattern: We tend to exalt those with whom we agree and who can benefit us in some way. And we tend to reject those with whom we don't agree and who do not have anything "good" to offer us.**

## **Exegesis of the Text**

Today's gospel presents us with a crisis of faith, a difficult teaching that will become a turning point for Jesus' disciples. Although the crowd was initially enthusiastic about the idea of Jesus as one like Moses who could provide this miraculous bread (John 6:34), they reject the identification of Jesus with manna. In verse 60, Jesus' own disciples declare his teaching to be "hard," and in verse 66 many of them turn away from him. What is it about Jesus' teaching that they find difficult? Although modern readers are conditioned to hear Jesus' words about those "who eat my flesh and drink my blood" (John 6:56) as a reference to the Lord's Supper, the disciples at the time would have no experience of the Eucharist. They reject Jesus' teaching because they think that he is referring to cannibalism. As in the Exodus story, the issue is not simply the grumbling of the people but the lack of trust in God. The Greek word *pisteuo* is a common word in John that is usually translated "believe." However, its more common meaning is to

trust or rely upon someone. Like the Israelites, they have experienced God's miraculous provision, but they do not trust that God will continue to provide for them in the wilderness. To partake of Jesus as manna involves a reliance on God. One way John expresses this throughout the Gospel is through the word "abide." The idea of "abiding" appears throughout John's Gospel. The same Greek word, *meno*, appears in John 6:56, although it is often translated "remain": "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me and I in them." Feeding on Jesus as manna means remaining or abiding with Jesus. It is through this proximity that Jesus brings life to those who eat (v. 57). But "abiding" with Jesus is difficult. Staying with Jesus and learning from him is a long process. For many, a quick fix would be more attractive. The crowd was initially attracted to Jesus when they saw him as a Moses figure — one that could work miracles and provide political victories. As they continue with him, they learn that Jesus is not offering an easy victory but the long road of discipleship. On a narrative level, the twelve are shown in this

passage as the ones who “abide” with Jesus. They stick with Jesus even though his teaching is difficult. Here, they recognize Jesus’ words as life giving and do not turn away. In doing so, they represent what it means to trust that God will provide manna. They stick closely to Jesus, who is the manna, and they listen to his words. This is their only real option — much like the Israelites stuck in the wilderness, whose only option is to return to slavery: “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus’ statement that the “flesh” is useless (verse 63) cannot be read as a rejection of bodily life or a denial of creation’s goodness. Witnessing a miracle or two is one thing. Unreserved commitment to the miracle worker can be another. When truth comes to us, we have two ways to respond to it: We can receive it or reject it.

## **Application**

**Chapter six begins with a huge crowd that needs to be fed and is interested enough to track down Jesus across the lake, but soon becomes disenchanted and grumbling. Even many of his disciples who stay around through the long sermon, in the end, cannot accept it. At the end of the chapter, only twelve are left, and even one of them will betray Jesus. The direction of chapter 6 is not, as far as “flesh” is concerned, a promising trajectory. The Gospel also causes people to stumble because it is costly. When Christ calls us to eat his flesh and to drink his blood, he is inviting us to participate in his death. The church is always tempted to remove the offense of the Gospel by tailoring its message to fit the world’s values. According to Richard Donovan,**

**The Gospel with no offense, however, is like a surgeon with no scalpel—having no power to heal. Christ, truly revealed, will**

**always be an offense except to the redeemed. The cross will always be an offense, except to the redeemed. The church must always be ready to give offense—to speak out for Christ and against the destructive beliefs and behaviors that the world finds so attractive.**

**Many years ago, a missionary society wrote to David Livingstone, a Scottish Presbyterian pioneer medical missionary in Southern and Central Africa, and asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only because there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."**

**Today we often are reluctant to present the demands of Christ to would-be disciples because we fear putting them off Christianity and driving them away. That is not the way of Jesus in this passage. His words are difficult for many people in this crowd to understand and harder still to follow. Christ's call to commitment is a**

**double-edged demand. First, it sets forth clearly his life mission and his expectation for those who would go further with him. Second, it weeds out shallowness of commitment from among them. As a result, thousands drop out. Look around you. See what is happening in some areas of the church. There are those who leave the church because they say, "I don't get anything out of it ... that church did not feed me ... it didn't meet my needs." For them, church is all about what it does for them, with little or no thought given to what they might do for the church or its master. In our day, sometimes as preachers we shy away from proclaiming the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ—love, peace, forgiveness, acceptance, grace, reconciliation—because we are afraid of people's reaction. We preach what we know people want to hear, not what God has called us to preach. May the almighty God help us to be fully fledged disciples of His word even when it is hard to follow. Amen.**

**The Rev'd Canon Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha  
Chaplain**