

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: August 25, 2024

“The Teachings of Discipleship”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Today we come to the teachings of Jesus, and exactly what it is that Jesus was asking of his followers, and of us.

Chapter 6 of John was read several weeks back and 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. Jesus tries to explain to them that they have come for bread related to this material earth, while he, Jesus, gives them spiritual food. 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” and the material world is concerned, a promising trajectory.

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 who could work miracles and provide political victories. But as they continued with him, they learned that Jesus is not offering an easy victory but the long road of discipleship.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and his compulsion is our liberation.” And this is true. But even though God’s hardness is still kinder than any kindness we can offer, we can’t get past the fact that it is still hard. Even though God promises liberation and freedom, we can’t get past the fact that we are compelled into seeking that freedom, often in ungodly and the non-approved ways of ego and greed.

All of the disciples – the wider group following Jesus and the twelve – face the difficult teaching of Jesus.

So, let's remind ourselves what's so difficult to accept:

Number 1 - that there is a nourishment we need from God that only comes through accepting and trusting that God will guide you through the rough spots as he did the Israelites in the desert.

...that Jesus is the eternal bread of life that provides and sustains; because he is teaching acceptance and loving God and neighbor no matter where you are on your path.

...that the Father draws in and teaches all who are able to accept these truths; that once you open your heart to feel God's love in the world around you, you will be freed from worrying about whether you are worthy enough.

...that we need to literally integrate the very body and blood of Christ into ourselves; meaning ingesting his teachings of benevolence and sacrifice, not just in words but in action.

...that if we come to him, we will never be hungry or thirsty again; God will provide for us, as we provide for each other.

...and that the Spirit of God is life; and all we are is received as a gift from God.

For those who were seeking worldly comforts, Jesus was not for them. Jesus was asking them to give up their prejudices, be compassionate, not focus on material things, and that it was alright to bend tradition for the well-being of the whole.

The lectionary today leaves out verses 70-71 of John, chapter 6 in which Jesus reminds the twelve that though he chose them to come to him, one of them is the devil who will betray him. Ending the reading with verse 69 allows us to end on the high note of faith and trust, but I actually, take some hope from reading these two following verses.

⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

For me, it underscores the imperfect nature of our faith and that holy living does not need to make us doubt whether we ever truly believed and accepted God's reality as *the* reality. For one, we can't fully know God's reality; it's too amazing and immense and of-God for us to even begin to comprehend.

And in a way, we all are Peter and Judas at times in our lives, but we also know that we are forgiven.

God seems to be working life, in the midst of what seems like apparent failure and rejection. The church is still called to see that it continues working in such a way that the Word of Life is doing its work around us, among us, and within us. The presence of Peter the denier, and even of Judas the betrayer, at the end of this text is a striking note of hope. Our natural inclination is to turn and leave, to avoid the difficult call and above all to avoid the sacrifice and the cross. Yet the Word, the Spirit, and the Father continue to call, and enlighten, and draw us to life.

We are called as our Epistle says today, to *"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints."*

Learning to honor and praise all that God has done in our lives. To model the grace and mercy of Jesus to others, even when it is hard, to give of oneself, not for ego's sake, but for the glory of God, to care for others as you would want to be cared for, and lastly to forgive as you have been forgiven. This is much more easily said than done! We are called today to feed ourselves with the Word and Spirit; to put on our armor and work in the world for good. We are called to continue to try to walk in the way of Jesus and do God's will. Nobody ever said it was going to be easy, *"but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* Amen.