

Now therefore . . . serve God in sincerity and in faithfulness (Joshua 24.14-16). In the name of God. Amen.

I.

Today, on our fifth Sunday of trying to absorb the signs and words of Jesus from the Gospel of John – back to Mark next week – we hear John’s description of the fall out that results from Jesus’s teaching.¹

Earlier those listening to Jesus are "the crowd" then "the Jews." Now it is "many of his disciples."² There is quite a range of responses to Jesus among his disciples . . . There is "grumbling" (v. 61); "not believing" (v. 64); "betrayal" (vv. 64, 71); "turning back" (v. 66); and a confession of faith with "believing" and "knowing" (v. 68-69).

Francis J. Moloney (The Gospel of John, Sacra Pagina) says of Peter's confession: "For the first time in the narrative a character has expressed faith in Jesus for the right reasons: his origins."³ [emphasis in original, p. 229]. For John, proper belief in Jesus includes confessing that he has come from God. He is not just from Nazareth or from Joseph and Mary.

The "disciples" have been with Jesus since the beginning. They are first-hand witnesses of the feeding miracle (6:8, 12). They are first-hand witnesses of Jesus walking on the water (6:16, 22) and they are a distinct group from "the crowd" (6:24). Now "the disciples" (perhaps like "the Jews"?) are divided by their ability/inability to continue following Jesus (6:60, 61, 66). In Chapter 8, verse 31, we also find a distinction between Jews who "believe in Jesus" and those who are "truly his disciples" -- those who "continue in [Jesus'] word."

The Jews begin to dispute among themselves: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat" (John 6.52)? And Jesus answers: "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." And in turn, the disciple’s express their own doubt of acceptance. "This teaching is difficult," they say, "Who can accept it?" (v. 60). And many of them turn away and stop following Jesus altogether.

II.

In today’s gospel, Jesus turns to the 12 and asks if they are going to leave him, as well. "Do you wish to go away?" Jesus asks (v. 67). This is the first time in the Gospel of John that Jesus’ closest disciples are named, "the twelve."⁴ As is so often the case in the Gospels, Simon Peter answers with a question of his own. "Lord, to whom can we go?"

This is either an expression of despair or an expression of exultation. "Where else do we have to go?" Surely, there are many places Peter and his friends can turn. There are business prospects, family commitments, status that calls for their attention, another purchase to be made, another relationship to explore, another position to pursue, another enemy to withstand, another grief to mourn, another country to explore.

But Peter and the disciples know what they have found. Their decision not to turn away but to walk forward with Christ draws them together as a community of faith. It is not any particular creed, mission statement, style of worship, or service program that unites them as the body of Christ. It is their professed willingness to follow Jesus Christ that renders them a community of faith. It is our commitment to follow Christ along side others that makes us the people of God.

¹ <http://reformationwlb.org/multimedia-archive/sermon-proper-16-lectionary-21-b-2015-john-656-69-joshua-241-2a-14-18/>

² <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john6x56.htm>

³ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. *Sacra Pagina. The Gospel of John*. "The Crisis Created by the Word of Jesus." (Collegeville, Liturgical, 1998) 229.

⁴ Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm. *Feasting on the Word. Year B. Volume 3*. "Proper 16 (Sunday Between June 5 and June 11 inclusive).. A Homiletical Perspective." (Louisville, Westminster, 2011) 385.

It is here that today's Gospel text finds its strong connection to our first reading from Joshua. Standing in the land of promise near the end of his life, Joshua gathers all the tribes of Israel and recounts what it means to be part of God's community of faith. Joshua recounts all that God has done and then challenges the people to make a choice: "Choose this day whom you will serve." Will you go or will you stay? Are you God's people? Or aren't you God's people?

III.

Now, it is really a shame that we skip from verse 2a to verse 14 of our reading from Joshua today, because it is in those verses that Joshua reminds the people of God's saving work, delivering them, repeatedly, through many water crossings, into whole new lives as God's people.

First, calling Abraham and Sarah from the other side of the Euphrates to the land of Canaan, making their descendants numerous through Isaac and Jacob. Then, calling Moses and Aaron to lead those numerous descendants out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea, into a whole new life as God's covenant people based on the giving of the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai.

Then, calling Joshua to lead the people, after Moses' death, across the Jordan River and into the land of promise, where they lived on land that they did not till, in cities that they did not build, eating the fruits of vineyards and olive groves that they did not plant.

The Euphrates, the Red Sea, the Jordan. It is as though during the creation, *The Spirit of God - Sophia - . . . moving over the face of the waters* saw all that water and said to herself, *That will come in handy one day. When we need a way of setting people free, I'll lead them through that water. When we need a way of summoning justice, I'll tell the prophet to call for justice 'to roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'* (Amos 5.24). When we need a way for people to put their tired, sinful lives behind them, I'll move over this water and stir up some new life. And when a child is born of water to a family of God's people, I will use the water of baptism to claim that child as God's own."

IV.

Today, we baptize Sean Lucas Latterner. As a community of faith – as the body of Christ – and as parents and godparents – we will reaffirm our own Baptismal vows and promise to work together to help Sean to grow into the full stature of Christ.

We will promise to continue in the apostles teaching, and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. We will promise to proclaim the Good News. How will we proclaim the good news of respect and care, of love and forgiveness, of hope and responsibility? Francis of Assisi says that we should proclaim the Gospel every day, and sometimes use words. Our actions will teach our children.

In the Anglican tradition, after the baptism with water, I will make the sign of the cross on Sean's forehead and say: "Sean, you are marked and sealed as Christ's own forever." Live as a disciple of Christ: fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith.

We are human beings connected in one community by our creator, embraced in the saving love of the one God. The continuous calling into being is what breathes life into us, because the conversation and community at the heart of God is still at work.

As we reaffirm our own baptismal vows and promise to teach Sean – by thought, word and deed – what it means to value others, and what it means to be the healing life-giving, nurturing, serving "body of Christ," may we also be strengthened to go out into the world and do the work God has given us to do. Amen.