

Sermon outline Sunday August 23

Cathedral of the Incarnation

The elections next year will be the third time I have lived through a presidential election cycle. In Australia, where I come from, our national elections might have a campaign of say 6 months. Here though we endure a campaign of maybe two years. I often hear during the debates and in the newspapers that this election comes at a critical time for the nation and the world. No doubt it is true. The President of the United States does act as a sort of defacto leader of the free world.

As President Obama ends his term next year we will all question whether the president has been successful in making the world a better place for us to live. However I can almost guarantee that in 2017, after the next president is inaugurated, there will be a slew of books that say President Obama was a great president, and probably as many that will say he was a terrible president.

I guess that we will each decide based on our own experiences, and on our own understanding about our communities and our personal situations. No doubt we will measure success in how well we have been looked after. We will look for tangible ways in which we are better off such as having more affordable healthcare. I wonder though if the commentators, and we ourselves, will look at the success or otherwise of the president in terms of whether he made our community fairer and more just.

If we go back to the first century the people of those days were also seeking to find a leader that ultimately would make their lives better. A few weeks ago the gospel reading was the first section of the Sixth Chapter of John where the crowd that comes around Jesus is fed with bread and fish. If you recall after the feeding the crowd closed in on him, wanting to make him king. They felt that Jesus was a prophetic man that should be their king, someone who would make their lives better. But Jesus was having none of it and went away to pray.

We as humans are never really satisfied. We grumble and moan about the state of the world and our own circumstances, and indeed about the church. Indeed this condition of ours is not new. Moses experienced his people grumbling and they ended up demanding an idol to worship, something tangible. The same thing happened when they eventually settled in the promised land. After a time the judges were not enough, so they demanded a king. They wanted a divine earthly monarch because like us all we want someone who we can see and maybe touch.

The balance of Chapter 6 is I think one of the most important gospel passages for us to understand as a church. In these passages Jesus becomes the pivot point in history inviting those that have been attracted to his message and miraculous feats to be transformed into a new community of faith, to be transformed from the violent sacrifices that were demanded as a price of worshipping God, to a community of peace and welcoming to the other. Jesus only asked that they believe in his teaching.

Jesus is the Word made flesh according to John, and this is how John opens his gospel account, "In the beginning was the word," and in v14, "The Word became flesh and

lived among us". Jesus is the incarnated God. It wasn't until Jesus was born and matured that the early Jewish community had to confront what Jesus was teaching them about God, and his relationship to God. He was saying that he indeed was the Word made flesh.

After Jesus taught them in the synagogue they found what he said hard to understand. "How can we eat your flesh" they wondered aloud. So now the disciples are troubled. Jesus though never demands they do one thing over another. He questions them and asks, "Does this offend you?" What if I were to give you proof of my divinity, if you saw me ascend from whence I came. If the disciples stayed they could have been transformed through the spirit of faith. But the majority decided to leave, even after the offer of proof. Only the twelve stay.

We too might find a lot of what Jesus says hard to understand. We read that those disciples that found it hard walked away. When we too find it hard we can choose to walk away as well. In walking away though we make the decision not to seek to understand the meaning behind Jesus teaching, to remain in ignorance of his message, maybe forever.

The power of this gospel passage I believe is that Jesus invites those that stay into a new community. It is this new community, based on the precept of love, rather than the violence of the old ways, that will provide the structure for their spiritual life. We are here today because those early disciples stayed and listened, and worked through their difficulties of understanding.

So today and every day as we confront the challenges of life in this community, Jesus continues to ask us the same question, "Does this offend you?" Does the word of God offend us? Jesus provides the assurance and tells us, that "It is the spirit that gives life: the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken are spirit and life".

"Do you wish to go away?" he says to the remaining twelve. "To whom shall we go" Peter says. And I say today as well. "To whom shall we go." Despite the difficulties of life, the challenges of being transformed by faith in Jesus, and the desire we have for tangible answers to our questions, we stay and we form and strengthen our community. We stay and experience the spirit working through each of us together to lift the down trodden, to heal the broken-hearted, to comfort those in pain and to feed the sheep.

So when you feel defeated and weakened in your life remember this passage from John. Create some space in your life for the spirit of Jesus to fill you and surround you. Stay. Pray. Come together to find stillness and to experience the spirit at work in each other.

This is where we need to be, deep in the heart and spirit of our Lord, for this is where the spirit of God will speak to us.

Amen