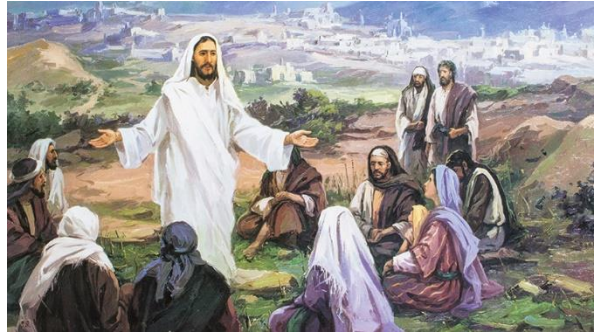


Worship at Home – Trinity 12

Sunday 22nd August 2021

Prepared by Rev Adam Pawley, Rector



Prayer to start

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Bible Reading – John 6:56-69

⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

⁶⁰On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you — they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Thought

Today, Jesus invites his disciples to ‘eat his flesh and drink his blood’, saying ‘whoever feeds on this bread will live forever’. How do the disciples respond? Many of them said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

It seems that the disciples today struggle to accept Jesus’ teaching because it ‘offends’ them. It can be hard to accept Jesus’ teaching! It can be difficult to give up our own ideals, personal priorities or selfish wants – especially if they don’t align with what Jesus asks of us.

It is understandable why the disciples exclaimed, “This is a hard teaching”. It is noble of them to return with a question, “Who can accept it?” Difficult as it may be to accept Jesus’ teaching, they are willing and prepared to try to understand what Jesus is saying. Jesus after all have proved his worth to them so far, and they trust that there will be a good reason for his new teaching.

It was a hard teaching to accept because to eat the flesh and blood of a man is cannibalism! Plus the idea of eating and drinking blood of any creature let alone human blood, was forbidden by the Old Testament Law:

I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. (Leviticus 17:10-11)

But here is the point. Jesus was not talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood literally. Rather he was saying to be a follower of Jesus, we need to let Jesus' blood – Jesus' life – become the lifeblood of our own lives. This is a hard teaching indeed. We should not be surprised when some of our peers decide to give up following Jesus – it's always happened this way – “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (v66)

A wise university friend, quoting a retired bible college principal, said to me once, “Adam, always follow your conscience but remember your conscience can be educated”. It's brilliant advice. Brilliant, because our sense of right and wrong is guided by our conscience. To live at peace with ourselves we must always follow our conscience. Brilliant also, because we only have to look at the way humankind sometimes relates to one another, to see how the human conscience can desperately need re-educating. To live at peace with God we should be asking the question – how do our consciences need educating?

As we read the Scriptures, when Jesus very often challenges us on the way we think and currently live our lives and we can find it 'a hard teaching, difficult to accept', it does us well to remember this however: “The Spirit gives life... The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life.” (v63). Today, Jesus invites us to let his blood become our own lifeblood.

When the disciples found his teaching difficult to accept they asked him to help them. Here is one outcome – Peter realises “You have the words of eternal life” (v68). In due course, the disciples would realise that Jesus on the Cross, giving up his body and blood for us was the final act of atonement (at-one-ment) on his part needed to make our peace with God. All we have to do now, is respond – trust Jesus can forgive our sins, trust Jesus' words can educate our consciences for the better, live by his 'hard teaching', confident that he will bring us life – eternal life – life that's worth living for today and always.

Closing Prayers

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus. When his teaching is hard or difficult to accept, help us not to run away from it but to seek to understand his teaching and live by it. Thank you for the new life and renewed life that you give to us when we choose to follow Jesus. Fill us afresh with your Spirit and words of life, please. In Jesus Name. **Amen.**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

We hope you are safe and well. Please get in touch if we can help (Gareth 07731 827988, Adam 01978 760439 – on annual leave this week). This Sunday (22 August) we have Morning Worship at 9:30am in Penyffordd, 11am in Hope, and 11am in St John's. Our next midweek communion will be on Thursday 9 September at 1:30pm in Hope Church.

This is my last Worship At Home before I move to Welshpool. My last Sunday with you is 29 August (Penyffordd, St John's) and 5 Sep (Hope). May I take this opportunity to say how wonderful it has been to be Rector here in Hope for these past eight years. Thank you for giving me opportunity to bless and serve you, and for the joy that you have brought me in ministry. May God continue to bless you richly, and give you his hope, strength and peace. In Christ, Adam.