

12TH SUNDAY after PENTECOST

August 15, 2021

COLLECT: ALMIGHTY GOD, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruit of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: Old Testament: Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm: 34:9-14

Epistle: Ephesians 5:15-20

Gospel: John 6:51-58

THE SERMON: Paul's letter to the Ephesians is timeless. Its meaning is just as true today as it was when Paul first wrote it. The central message is to be careful how you live, and understand what God wants of you.

Paul tells us to be wise, to make good decisions and to make the best of our lives. We are not to do things in an excessive manner. I have heard it said that it best to do things in moderation.

Being wise and knowing how to monitor your behavior will also help you deal with problems. It doesn't matter if the problems are ones caused by yourself or problems from other places. You should be able to think before doing. It is certainly an asset to think fast, but act slowly. When faced with a problem, you should brainstorm, think of all possible solutions, then pick the best one.

Paul said he was living in evil times, but he still warned people to act wisely. That is still a desire for today.

We are living in challenging times. I won't say they are evil. I don't believe Satan is responsible for all the problems that the world is facing. Satan did not cause the COVID-19 Virus. But we can all agree it is a bad thing.

God has, in his divine wisdom, allowed a solution for dealing with this virus. We can get vaccinated, if your health condition allows, and wear a mask. Here is where there is a problem: God has allowed us to have choice and make decisions. We can choose to vaccinate or not. We can choose to wear a mask or not. **It is our personal decision to decide whether we are acting wisely.**

In the Gospel Jesus is presenting the Jews with a challenging choice. He tells them to; eat my flesh and drink my blood and then they would have life in them. This was an abhorrent idea.

The Jewish faith had kosher laws that prevented the people from being exposed to and drinking blood. There was the belief, though, that blood was life. Still this message sounded to them that Jesus was directing them to be cannibals. In fact, they asked among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

The people had witnessed Jesus feeding the 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. The people wanted a physical feeding not a change in their faith doctrine. Jesus further confounded them by saying, "I am the true bread of life that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. If you don't eat this bread, you don't have life in you."

Now this puzzled the Jews even more, they knew God gave their ancestors manna to eat in the desert, yet even with this divine intervention, they died. Now this rabbi is saying he is the Son of Man and that the Father of their ancestors has sent him, down from heaven and if they eat his flesh they will live forever.

This was indeed radical, even more so, because Jesus said, “I live because of the Father and who ever eats me will live because of me. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you abide in me and I abide in you. And, on the last day I will raise them up.”

Now the Jews believed there would be a day of reckoning, A day in which God would come and deliver justice and righteousness. He would separate the unjust from the unjust. The just would go to be with him. The unjust would be cast into a fiery pit where there would be great pain and gnashing of teeth. You could call this place hell.

Jesus also tells them, if they eat his flesh, they will have eternal life and never die.

Just what is eternal life? I think eternal life is having the presence of God always in your life allowing you to fight against sin and overcome all evil.

Now, let’s take a minute to think about what has happened. Jesus has introduced a radical idea that sounded like nothing the Jews had ever heard. They lived under the laws of Moses, the 10 commandments and other religious laws. They knew the history of the Jews and the journey to the Promised land. They knew God had sent Moses to lead them to this Promised Land and their freedom. They knew that before Moses died, he

preached to them that they should be faithful and live a life that would be pleasing to the God of their Fathers.

But now, imagine yourself as a practicing Jew. There is this rabbi Jesus, saying that you should believe in him and accept a new teaching. He is claiming that, he is the son of man, a human, sent down from heaven by his Father. He is proclaiming that if you believe in him, he will raise you up on the last day. He is also teaching that you will not die, but live forever.

Although this is difficult for you to believe, let's step into the future.

Now, today, we believe that Jesus is the Son of the Father, that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and that he offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life. In a few minutes we will celebrate the eucharist where we eat his body and drink his blood.

On page 358 of the (Episcopal) Book of Common Prayer we affirmed our faith that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. AMEN

Rev. Lionel Starkes