

**Sunday 25 August 2024**

**13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**1 Kings 8: 22 – 30; 41 – 43; Ephesians 6: 10 – 20;  
John 6: 56 – 69**

### **Eternal life**

I think you will probably agree with me that the world feels like a pretty dark place just now. The news brings us ongoing wars, injustices and appalling acts of violence almost daily. Climate change, it seems, is already upon us in the changes in the weather - fires, winds or floods. And there seems to be a general lack of concern for the poor and the disadvantaged. The world feels to me like a less kind place than it used to be. On top of all that we're facing a continued decline in church attendance – not all over the world, of course, but in our part of it. And many of us have our own personal issues which bring worry, grief and pain.

Against all of that backdrop it can sometimes feel hard for us all to keep going, and to keep on being

hopeful. We begin to wonder if God is really there. Why doesn't he do something?

Our Gospel reading today reminds us that, one way or another, it has always been tough to be a follower of Jesus. Just to recap the last few weeks as we have travelled through John's Gospel. There have been some stunning miracles – the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus' walking on water, not to mention the many healings Jesus has performed. Jesus has huge crowds of followers. But He has refused to be made King of the Jews, and now he's started saying some things that are really hard to take. He's referred to Himself as the bread that came down from heaven; He's started talking about people needing to eat his flesh and drink his blood. These are veiled reference to His death and resurrection which are to come, and to the Eucharist which Christians will one day share together.

For those in the crowds, at the time, without our advantage of knowing what is to come, hearing these words, this is not just 'difficult' teaching, as our translation has it – 'intolerable' and very

shocking might be a better way of putting it. So, Jesus is now losing many of those who have been following Him. This is not what they wanted to hear. It doesn't fit with their version of what will happen when God's chosen Messiah comes. Jesus has not met their expectations. They drift away.

Now things are quieter. He asks the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away? Testing to see how they will respond. Have they understood what so many have not?

*Pause*

As usual, it is Peter who responds first. "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6: 69)

For once, Peter has got it right. Jesus' words may be difficult – incomprehensible even, but they are the words of eternal life, and Jesus is the only one who embodies them. There is no one else.

So, what is eternal life? Later on in John's Gospel, Jesus says this: "And this is eternal life, that they

may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17: 3). Eternal life isn't just something that happens when we die. It's here and now. Eternal life is about knowing God and Jesus, being in relationship with them. Or, going back to Jesus' words at the beginning of our Gospel, eternal life is about abiding in Jesus, and Jesus abiding in us. (v56). That abiding begins now, in this life, and goes on for ever.

To live in relationship with Jesus is to be reorientated; to be called into a whole new quality of life. We know we are securely loved; we have Christ's spirit within us, the Holy Spirit, to guide and empower us for all that Jesus calls us to do. It doesn't all happen at once. We're slowly transformed, called into lives of unselfishness because instead of our wants and needs, Jesus is now at the centre of our being.

One wise Christian put it very simply, like this:

"Your kingdom is already growing in me.

I meet you as you spread out in me, and shape the landscape of my life after your will.” Ulrich Schaffer

Our vocation as Christians, our calling, is to help to bring about the kingdom of God; we’re to work against the powers and dominions of the world, pushing back the darkness and bringing in the light of God wherever we can. God will show us how.

We are not on our own. We have Jesus, and we have one another. Together, we are the church, now called to be a sign of hope and of the presence of God in the world.

It’s a high calling, perhaps you might say a tall order. No church is perfect. We may be tempted to feel discouraged. Jesus asks: ‘Do you wish to go away?’

Do we give up – or do we take up the challenge, put on the armour of God, as in our reading from Ephesians – and keep going, trusting in Jesus – the One who has the words of eternal life?

Let’s pray

Jesus, Son of God,  
Let your love shine through our eyes,  
Your Spirit inspire our words,  
Your wisdom fill our minds,  
Your mercy control our hands,  
Your will capture our hearts,  
Your joy pervade our being;  
Until we are changed into your likeness from  
glory to glory. Amen (Michael Perry).

Amen