

12th Sunday after Trinity 22-08-2021

Readings:

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Reading today's readings in preparation of this sermon, I had kind of mixed feelings.

The reading from Ephesians brought back memories from my time as a leader in KidZchurch in the days with Joan and Sally, Martin and Nikki. We put up a big knight in shining armour in the KidZchurch room and went through the text verse by verse explaining to the children how important it was to be 'firm and strong' in faith. And we sung together the song 'I will stand firm and strong, my eyes fixed on Jesus'. Sweet memories I might come back to later.

Then I went on to the reading of John's Gospel. Not the easiest piece of teaching. A little bit earlier in chapter 6 John explains how Jesus is the bread of life that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die. But the listeners in those days did not understand what the meaning of this was. They couldn't understand that Jesus came down from Heaven. They were saying: 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say: 'I have come down from heaven'?

And if we look at the first verse of today's portion of Gospel, things even get more complicated. Now Jesus says: 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.' What is he saying here? Is he calling us out to become cannibals? A number of people in those days must have thought so! They had no idea what Jesus was talking about.

Some scholars try to explain this piece of text as a referral to the Eucharist, but most others say that that is impossible. Until now Jesus hasn't touch upon the Eucharist at all; the apostles wouldn't have had a clue to what he was saying; the last supper hadn't happen yet. Jesus must have meant something different. Something he wanted his disciples to understand. *The bread from heaven is his message*, his word, that his followers should believe, have faith in. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood means as much as believing in Jesus Christ, in his message and follow him unconditionally. This was not easy to grasp, not then

and not now; in verse 60 it says: 'This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?' Jesus is aware that his followers are complaining and even leaving him. So, he keeps explaining: 'It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life, but among you there are some who don't believe'.

So Jesus says it quite clearly: it is all about the words that he has spoken, it's about his message. It's about believing his message. But Jesus has to admit that it will not be possible for everyone to believe in him; some will leave him.

And then he asks his closer circle of disciples, the apostles: 'Do you want to leave as well?' And on behalf of the rest Peter says: 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have words of eternal life. We have become to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' His closest circle of friends believe in him.

But what about us? Do we believe in him? Do we follow him? Or are we like so many disciples in his time who did not believe and turned their backs on him.

That is something Jesus really wants to know! Do we believe that he is the bread from heaven? Do we believe that the words Jesus has spoken are spirit and life? Do we align with Peter and the apostles saying: we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. There is no one else to whom we can go.

Do we really believe this and follow Jesus, knowing that this teaching is difficult as it says in verse 60. It was (and is) apparently so difficult that many disciples who met Jesus in person, heard him speak, talked to the man himself, were not able to believe and stopped following Jesus.

What do we do?

We have to realize that as Christians there is only one thing we can do. As Peter said: to whom can we go but to Jesus. We have to stand firm and strong, our eyes fixed on Jesus. And that brings us back to the text of Ephesians. We are asked to, or even told to, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. We have to put on the whole armour of God. We have to battle the forces of evil, the powers of darkness. And in his letter Paul gives us a number of pointers that we have to take into account; he calls it 'the armour of God' that can withstand evil.

He tells us to stand firm and put the belt of truth around our waist. He starts with 'truth' as the base of our firmness and strongness. Stick to the truth and don't be misguided by nice stories and temptations.

Then put on the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness as the basis of our society to protect our bodies, to protect our lives and the lives of others.

Paul tells us to stand on shoes of peace; we have to be ready to proclaim the Gospel of Peace, the Gospel of Jesus.

And then he says: let our faith be our shield to quench all the flaming arrows of evil. Our faith, given to us as grace from God, will protect us against the flaming arrows of evil. Of course on the condition that we accept God's gift.

And if we do we put on the helmet of salvation. Salvation will be the crown on our heads. The salvation brought to us by Jesus.

And crowned with salvation we can take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, meaning we cannot only defend ourselves against evil, but we will be able to bring the word of God to the end of the world.

And then Paul asks us to keep praying that this will all happen and that we will make known with boldness the Gospel of the Lord.

I will stand firm and strong, my eyes fixed on Jesus!

We are asked to stand firm and strong in faith and battle the forces of evil. Both John and Paul tell us about this in the first century, but now, almost two thousand years later, that battle is still on. There are too many examples of war and poverty in our world; there are too many examples of people misinterpreting the message of Jesus, the Gospel of love and righteousness.

For that reason we keep praying on a daily basis the Lord's Prayer: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. That is necessary before the kingdom will come.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we pray for your help and protection in the battle against evil. Keep the temptation away from us, make our hearts strong to stand firm and keep our eyes fixed on your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.