



THE NEW SHOFAR

Do we want to transform the world? Be imitators of Christ

Joshua 24:1-18 - John 6:60-69

Trinity 13

Baptism is no guarantee of a lifetime of a faithful following of Christ

From John's perspective, what is happening here with the Twelve is an insight into what is happening in his own Church and in our own Church today. We are presented with the sad reality of there being believers who refer to themselves as being followers of Jesus but when it comes to standing up for Gospel truths, they fall by the wayside. They know the Truth revealed to them by God through the scriptures but find the pressures of the world too much. What began with great enthusiasm and hope disappeared under the weight of bringing the Gospel into every part of their daily living.

This should not be read as applying only to those who allow their faith to lapse, who break off all contact with the Church community into which they were baptized and confirmed. It applies as much to those who continue to turn up for worship on Sundays but who rarely think of God, say a prayer or read the Bible in the days between Sabbaths. Discipleship in the mind of John is about a great deal more than "going to Church". It is about *hearing* and *obeying* the words of Jesus.

Christians abandon the fundamentals at their own peril

John would use our Gospel reading as a way of explaining why it is the Church today is struggling to regain a toehold in the world. Not enough of Jesus in the lives of Christians! This can be measured simply – the level of daily prayer, the regularity of participation in the sacraments, the time spent in prayerfully listening to God in the scriptures. These are three avenues for grace to work within the individual and within the community of faith. We do not pray enough. We do not read/study the Bible as God's revealed word. We do not partake of the sacraments of life and feed ourselves on the Body and Blood of Christ beyond our Sunday obligations.

Weakness in our own daily faith is a genuine threat to the entire Church

This is made clear in the First Letter of St John where we see a faith community having to struggle for survival because of the problems of needing to deal with the situation created by those who have mistaken beliefs, beliefs that threaten the unity and mission of the faith community... ⁶⁴ *But among you there are some who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him (4:5).* These failures impact not only on the faith lives of individuals but on the mission and ministry of the Church, of the whole of the Body of Christ in the world. ***The warning is clear:*** persevere in faith and the imitation of Christ or faith will die and the believer will return to a life of darkness.

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The realities of faith will always remain a mystery to us

One thing the Gospel shows us is how easy it is to give up on God, to walk away from Jesus Christ the Messiah. All it takes here is for these disciples to come across something they cannot understand or accept. Jesus tells them they cannot have *Life* if they do not *eat his body* and *drink of his blood*. That makes no sense for them. Such a teaching is going to be so difficult and embarrassing for them to follow when they are out and about among their friends and unbelieving members of their family. It is so contrary to their original beliefs. It pushes them beyond the point to which they are willing to go. Rather than persevering in Christ; instead of placing their trust in God's Son they turn and seek a more comfortable reality. They cannot trust Christ to be speaking a Truth when they struggle to make sense of it.

Faith is about a living relationship with God and not a set of beliefs

How true it is when John make the observation: *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'* And they go their own way. The Twelve do not understand the fullness of what Jesus is saying. Indeed, for the remainder of the ministry of Jesus they will struggle to understand what it is God is doing but their ministries do not end. The point is they believe in Jesus as God's *Holy One*. That is what makes their lack of understanding less of a problem. Understanding and comprehension are not essential parts of faith and discipleship. It is always helpful when faith can be expressed in logical, scientifically verifiable concepts and language but in the end, faith will always be about more than human knowledge can fathom and explain. The following of Jesus is founded on faith and much of our faith remains a mystery.

Here we have John's understanding of the way true faith operates. It does not begin with a full understanding. Understanding grows from the Christ, from the Christ who lives within us, within other believers – within the Church. Faith grows from the workings of the inner Spirit who leads the believer into a knowledge of the Truth. This heavenly Truth will stand out at odds with the *truths* of the world in which we live and therein we will find our challenge. Sometimes saying “no” to the world will test our faith to the utmost. Faith comes at a cost.

Our core challenge: Do we believe Jesus to be the Divine Son of God?

What is this *truth* that will transform their lives and bring them to the fullness of their humanity? This *Truth* which will change the way they live in the world, see the world and face the trials and tribulations of being human? The key transforming moment for John is when the Twelve *believe* and *know* the truth about this man Jesus. What is that Truth? He is the Holy One of God. Jesus is God's divine Son and that is a rock sure foundation on which to build the rest of their lives.

How easy it is to rattle off our Sunday creed, to proclaim the words of our prayers and songs as a part of our celebration of the faith of the Church. How difficult it is to live as the Body of Christ in the world. How close to impossible it becomes for us to feed the hungry, welcome the refugee, reach out to those on the margins and embrace those in need of any kind. In other words, how tough it is to *live as Christ* to others, to be living conduits for God's love in the world. In the end, this is the only *faith* that matters, the *faith* that brings Christ alive for others.

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