

August 23 2015    Year B Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Newport United Church of Christ

### **Scripture Lessons~**

*Psalm 84*

*Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18*

*John 6:56-69*

### **Sermon     *Fair-Weather Disciples***

I don't have to tell you that difficulties come and go during the course of life, there are health problems, there are family problems, and there are economic problems sometimes even severe setbacks as some people who are experiencing fires even today.

The strangest aspects of faith in midst of crisis is that people can go away from faith as well as come to faith. I say it strange, because most of us seldom think of people rejecting faith and then just walking away. We usually like to focus on people coming to Jesus, accepting baptism or some other sign of confirmation and then living in close harmony living with God for the rest of their lives happily ever after. That sometimes happens I suppose. But a lot of times people are like those from 'text in John's Gospel, they turned their backs on God and they simply walk away. I am sure that many of us have felt that way from time to time. I have felt that way. Some of you may have even perhaps done like those folks did and walked away for a time during a time of crisis in your life. Some modern Christians have a dreamy thought about what New Testament times were really like and think that they were categorically easier than life today.

One person once said to me that if I had just lived in Jesus' time and I had known Jesus in person, surely I would have believed, surely, my faith would have been stronger knowing Jesus in person. And maybe that would have been true. But it might not have been either because not everybody that met Jesus followed Jesus, not everybody who heard Jesus teach, believed what Jesus had to say. Verses 66 and 67 in John's Gospel made it quite clear about the fact of Jesus teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood was just too much for some of those folks to swallow. Verse 66 says that the result of this caused many of his disciples withdraw and didn't walk with him anymore. The word disciple here does not refer to the 12 disciples that Jesus chose but the people who followed Jesus when he was giving away bread during that special eating situation. Large crowds came to him but when Jesus told them things that they were not really

ready to hear or unwilling to hear they turned away from him. In this entire 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John is essential in understanding the conflict and his rejection by these folks. They wanted to make Jesus king but it had to be on their terms but Jesus refused. They were willing to follow him if he was the kind of messiah that they wanted but Jesus as usual turned the tables and asked if they would accept him on his terms not their own and when that happened many of them turned away and faded back into the wood work. You know the situation is not greatly different today because each of us is still trying to squeeze Jesus into our own mental mold; into our own little boxes. We try to make God over again into our image rather than allowing God to make us over into God's image. Do you ever find yourself doing that? I do almost every day and I have to catch myself. In today's text, is a good corrective to our temptation to make Jesus to get into the box which we have built for Jesus to inhabit?

When the disciples fled; Jesus asked the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" What a pointed question. And look in the story as to who is left. Someone, I forget who it was, pointed out chapter six opens with five thousand plus excited picnickers and closes with 12 troubled disciples of whom one eventually betrayed Jesus and the second eventually denied Jesus.

I have often asked myself, "Why do people fall away from Jesus?" Why do people just fade away? I think there are a whole lot of reasons. Some of us have never really gotten a good idea of who Jesus might be? Maybe we have heard something from somebody. maybe been to church a time or two maybe watched a televised worship program but these impressions might be misleading and fail to bring us to the living Jesus. Another reason why people reject Jesus is because of the actions and attitudes of Jesus' own people. That is when I want to hide under a rock someday. Others look at us, some look at our bad behavior say you know if that is what it means to be Christian, help me out of that stuff. And then walk away. Still other try to follow Jesus for a while and then get tired of the journey and they simply quit, they might be severely disappointed with what they got when compared to what they think they were promised. They might have been knocked around severely by the waves of life. Others of us live lives that are sometimes hurtful and sometimes harmful to ourselves to other people and want nothing to do with from the challenges of the gospel from the very start.

Jesus question to his disciples as I said before is a pointed one, "You don't want to leave me too, do you? This question by Jesus expresses his disappointment in, what I would say, were shallow followers. Jesus came into the world to show and teach us the way of God's love and forgiveness In order to

share God's love and carry the message of forgiveness Jesus needed that inner circle of the twelve helpers. He needed the twelve disciples and to carry out his work and take that one step further he needs each one of us here today. In verses 68 and 69 Simon Peter answered that question that was posed by Jesus in the previous verse. Jesus wanted to know if they were going to leave him also. And Simon Peter's answer was a classic one, "Lord to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and we have come to know you are the holy one from God". Almost like those vows we take in marriage, for better or for worse; richer or for poorer, and in sickness and in health. The statement of the recognition that for the longing for eternal life which is one of humanity deepest hunger can be satisfied by giving one's life over to God.

What exactly does the New Testament mean by the terms of eternal life? One person defines it by saying it is a never ending experience of being and living with God; a never ending experience of being and living with God. I think it begins with a person's first step on the journey of faith and continues for all eternity and in this way eternal life has quantity but eternal life also has quality. It is an inner life of a person who has said yes to God. Such a person becomes more and more like the person that God intends for him or her to become. Eternal life then is a quality of life on earth which then leads to a quantity in that life to come. Jesus disciples knew they had nowhere else to go and really when you think about it can any of us do any better during the course of life. There are plenty dangerous and a difficult pathway in life but Jesus is the bread of life that satisfies our deepest hunger. And Jesus comes into each of our lives and makes the same offer that he made to those disciples of old. Food that will never end in hunger or drink that will never end in thirst. And the question always remains will we accept that gift that energizes our souls or will we simply fade away. Will we be fair-weather friends or fair weather disciples of Jesus? Each of us must give our own answer to Jesus pointed question.

And together we say-AMEN