

Proper 14B
John 6:56-69
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Look to Jesus

In case you hadn't heard, today is a big day for my family. At the 10:15 service I will have the privilege of baptizing my grandson, Dylan, initiating him into the community of believers through the waters of baptism. It's not everyday that a Nana gets to baptize one of her own, so today will always be special. So if you're here for awhile after this service and see a crowd of 30 or so visitors milling about before the 10:15, you can probably count on them being part of the extended family of my son David and his wife Emily.

Grandparents and parents know from the day their children or grandchildren enter their lives that they are all extraordinarily special. So you won't be surprised to hear from me that Dylan's is simply the most precious 3-month-old. His personality just pops out with his big smile. He's wide-eyed and curious, and it's a joy to watch him encounter new things, seeing those unfettered emotions dance across his face, changing from moment to moment when he encounters something new: that puzzled look, or the look of wonder and joy, and even that squinched up little face when he's not particularly pleased. I'd do anything I possibly could to help this little man grow to be happy and healthy, to insure he has good opportunities in life. But more than anything I want him to know what he can count on and where he can look to find his way, when down the road his life doesn't always go oh-so-smoothly. For even my beloved grandson will someday face challenges and difficult times. We all do. It's part of this life.

These past several weeks, we've been reading the 6th chapter of John. We've learned about the incredible events and signs showing God's hand in Jesus' work: his feeding of the multitudes, walking on the water, and stilling the storm. Jesus has been followed by large crowds who have been fascinated by what he does, even if they don't quite understand all his teachings. And Jesus has continued to explain who he is: the bread of life, the true bread, the source of eternal life. He's let the crowds know that those drawn to him are called by God, for it is God's initiative alone that draws all to faith.

Today we hear that Jesus has shifted from addressing the crowds to talking to the larger group of disciples. He knows they are struggling: following Jesus is getting hard. There's grumbling and complaining about his teachings, they're offended by what he says. They cannot move beyond what they already know, cannot see other possibilities in God, possibilities that stretch beyond the history and traditions of the Passover, the manna, and the Law. These disciples are unable to recognize Jesus' words as Spirit and life, and have turned away. They no longer follow him.

It can be easy for us to dismiss the actions of the disciples, thinking they're lazy or faithless. But we need to remember that these people are those who believed, who wanted to believe, who tried to believe. They were people who had real concerns and needed help with their life problems. I imagine some had placed their entire lives on hold, waiting for Jesus to show himself to be the Messiah they expected, to save them from oppression, to bring them to new

freedom. But they had come to that place where they could no longer move forward, no longer envision the possibilities, and in their disillusionment and disappointment, they turned away. Unfed faith can be so very, humanly fragile.

Is it so different for us today? Where do we look for hope when times are tough? Where do we look for new life? The cares and worries of our own day-to-day lives can keep us so tangled up, that we too can forget what it means to abide in Jesus. Who hasn't wondered if belief is in vain, perhaps during a dark night when you watched and prayed beside a sick loved one who was suffering, or when you found yourself alone early in the morning questioning why a marriage has ended, or maybe you spent a quiet afternoon sadly wondering why your family seems to never, ever, get along. There are times for all of us when we question "Why, Lord, why have things not turned out the way I had hoped. Will things ever turn out right?"

We will have times when it's difficult to feel God's presence, when it's hard to faithfully follow our Risen Lord. We may not openly say, "I don't believe," but maybe we aren't praying as regularly as we once did, nor finding that quiet time to simply rest in God. Perhaps we aren't attending worship like we used to, or maybe we even stop spending time with others who love us, afraid that they may question why we seem to be backing away. Or we simply stop helping others. It can sometimes feel easier to turn away.

While hearing about disciples abandoning Jesus isn't a pretty picture, it is realistic. But the lesson doesn't stop here, for next is a sign of great hope, courage, and faith. For when Jesus sees the disciples pull back and draw away, he asks the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" and Peter replies, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

These twelve are no different than you or me. They aren't superheroes who never fall short in their faith. There are plenty of times when Peter and the twelve get things dead wrong, but in this particular moment, Peter gets it exactly right. He knows where to look for his help, he knows where to find the strength to continue to follow God's call, in spite of life's disappointments. Peter knows where he will find new life, for he looks to Jesus.

He looks to Jesus. "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

The twelve believe, not because of the signs and the miracles, but because they've come to know that Jesus is One with God. Their belief is not based on information or knowledge they've gained. Instead, their belief is a Spirit-filled response to God Almighty, made known to them through Jesus. The disciples look to Jesus, the source of life and Spirit.

We too need to remember look to Jesus:

- For in him is the strength and help we need, when we deal with life's difficulties and disappointments.
- For in him, the true bread, we find nourishment, in both the Word and Sacrament, to feed and nurture our faith.
- For in him, we find eternal life.

Faith is all about allowing ourselves to be drawn by God, to opening ourselves to that life-giving gift of grace, the gift of life and love through our Lord and Savior.

Look to Jesus, for he is where we find our strength and our help. Jesus is where we feed our faith. He is the one we can always count on; he is who we can look to, to help us find our way.

My hope and prayer for the soon to be newly baptized, and for all the community of believers, is that we can learn, we can remember, we can all know to look to the Lord. For Jesus is the Holy One of God, our hope and our salvation.