

### 8.22.21 L21P13 Staying with Jesus the Word of Life

- It was P. T. Barnum, the famous circus owner, who figured out that after he set up his big circus tent outside of town, if you took a shiny, colorful wagon, put the circus band on it, and have it pulled through the streets, crowds of people would follow the wagon
  - So P. T. Barnum used a bandwagon to gather crowds, and he made sure that the bandwagon's route ended at the ticket booth to his circus
  - Today, we associate bandwagons with many things
    - Some people aren't fans of a sports team until that team begins to win, and then they jump on the bandwagon
    - Some people who are performers labor in obscurity until a few people from the audience share their excitement by word of mouth and social media, and then people jump on the celebrity bandwagon
    - Some politicians come from behind and become frontrunners, because their momentum builds, and in addition to their early supporters, more people jump on their bandwagon
- Apparently Jesus also had a bandwagon
  - To the amazement of a crowd of over 5000 people, Jesus had fed them with bread
  - Soon after that, during the night his disciples went out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a storm rose up.
    - For hours they endured the storm, and they rowed and rowed without making headway
    - But then once again they were amazed – they were amazed to see Jesus walking on water through the storm, and in the midst of their fear, Jesus climbed into the boat with them and brought them to the shore
  - Feeding the multitude and walking on water – this attracted a large number of followers and disciples
    - But then Jesus began to teach
    - And as we have heard over the last weeks he taught... and taught about bread – not the bread that he had used to feed them, but rather the bread

from heaven that had come down to bring new life into a dying world filled with people in bondage to sin and death

- Furthermore, this bread was no one less than Jesus himself
- And in today's gospel, Jesus made two claims that took the breath away from his followers
  - The first breath-taking claim was that not only had the bread come down from heaven, but that Jesus himself was that bread that had come from heaven
  - And the second breath-taking claim that Jesus made was this: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. [Jn. 6:56-67]"
- Jesus' claim to be from heaven was just too much for some people, and the claim that in order to have life his followers would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood was just too graphic
- And so some of the people on Jesus' bandwagon said, "This teaching is difficult: who can accept it? [6:60]"
- Almost every Sunday, at least in this setting of the Communion liturgy we sing this: "Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia." [ELW p. 188]
  - We sing those words as a Gospel acclamation
  - We sing those words as a way to prepare ourselves to hear the gospel lesson
  - We sing those words as a way to declare our eagerness to listen
  - And like so much of our Communion liturgy, those words are a direct quote from scripture – in fact a direct quote from today's gospel lesson
  - But today's gospel lesson reminds us that these words of faith were originally spoken at a difficult moment – the Gospel of John says, "Because of this (that is Jesus' uncomfortable words about coming from heaven and

eating his flesh and drinking his blood) – because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. [6:66]”

- People were jumping off the bandwagon, followers were making a run for it, and only a handful of disciples were left
  - Jesus asked those who remained if they wanted to leave too, but Simon Peter spoke these words of faith that we sing so many Sundays, “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. [6:68-69]”
- Today, we dare to believe that Jesus, the Holy One of God, has the Word of Eternal life
  - Jesus was hanged on a cross, buried in a tomb, and rose from the dead, to be the Holy One who takes away the sin of the world
  - And while sharing forgiveness and life with us is wonderful thing, Jesus also teaches things that many people of the world, and even sometimes we ourselves find difficult to accept
    - Jesus teaches difficult things like the Spirit of God blowing wherever it wants including calling us to faith, so that we are not the masters or lord of our lives
    - Jesus teaches difficult things like welcoming sinners like the scandalous woman at the well, and later even welcoming us
    - Jesus teaches difficult things like feeding the multitude, but not using that fame to challenge Rome
    - Jesus teaches difficult things like not denying Jesus when he was put on trial, but then Peter did – and we would deny him too. And so we discover that God’s love for us is not even broken or destroyed by denial
- It’s easy to jump on a bandwagon, but the call of Jesus Christ to discipleship has both difficult words and the word of eternal life.
- Instead of followers who jump on and then off the bandwagon, Christ calls us to be disciples who will stay with him,

because we have come to believe the greater promise of God is  
that no matter what, Jesus Christ will stay with us