

Dedication and hard work typically pay off, no matter what the goal and focus. In the summer of 2018, after realizing that I needed to be in better shape; I began running. I started this practice while on vacation in my home state of Michigan, which is extremely pleasant in the summer. I continued to jog when I returned to Texas, where it feels like summer most of the year.

Each morning, I would wake up and go for a run. When I finally got up to 4 miles in one hour, I was so excited!! Of course my husband, who is unfailingly honest, pointed out that this was more of a walk - or jog at best - than a run. He encouraged me to keep going. With these honest words, I continued, and in January 2020 I ran a marathon in less than 4 hours! I continue to run consistently each week.

This same dedication is the type of focus and energy we put into our faith in Jesus. A Christian life might be full of challenging choices, perhaps some difficult feedback. It might feel discouraging occasionally. Yet the truth remains: We must be all in for Jesus.

It is a tough fact; one that I wish Jesus did not require. I wish Jesus said, "Following me is easy. Do as you please."

That is not the message of Jesus. Jesus wants us to dwell in him. Our very hearts are to be part of him and each other.¹ This idea of being part of Jesus' very being, his essence, is what begins our gospel for today. Jesus says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

You can probably see the connections to the Eucharist. When we take in the bread and wine, we are taking part in Christ being in us as we are in him.² If we do this, we are all in for Jesus.

There are many aspects of life that make it hard to be fully focused upon God's ways. Consider today's Old Testament reading. Joshua is telling the Israelites that they must choose between these other gods and the one True God. Since the Israelites aren't following God's ways, Joshua is giving them a choice. You can be all in, or out.

In our own society, we may not have the gods of the River, but we have so many ways to be distracted or otherwise fill our hearts with trivial matters. There is social media, 24 hour news, celebrities including musicians, politicians, and athletes. We can seek all of these things first and then convince ourselves that we don't have any time left over for God.

Of course, the Bible is full of people who fell short in their devotion to God: David had Bathsheba, Moses doubted God, even patient Job eventually railed against God's will. Worldly distractions and the pursuits of great wealth were huge obstacles Jesus warned his followers about back then, and they are still huge temptations today. Jesus doesn't want casual fans. He wants us to be all in.

Living as a Christian is never easy. This is evident in our reading from Ephesians. The language of battle is employed.³ We would not have to make ourselves

¹ The Greek word μένει is used along the language of being part of someone's body.

² The idea of embodiment is present throughout scripture. The idea of embodiment can be seen in scripture: consistent with Oliver, Juan. "Liturgia Latina," *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 101 #4, Fall 2019. p.581ff

³ Carlson, R. (2021) <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-2/commentary-on-ephesians-610-20-6>

warriors for Christ if the path were an easy one.⁴ The scriptures in Joshua and Ephesians point to the difficulty of following God and needing to be armed with God's grace and mercy.⁵

Putting these passages together with our Gospel from John, it is clear that Jesus is beginning to draw distinctions between the new life we find in him.

What does it look like to be partly committed to Jesus? Jesus had a trusted friend, a treasurer, who was with him at times, but not always. Jesus knew this was coming, and reminded them of his pending betrayal. Yes, Judas was devoted to Jesus for a while, but he had his limits. He wanted money and power. He was in at first, but Judas was not all in at the end.^{6,7}

The sobering truth is that there will be a cost to following Jesus. Following Jesus may make it more difficult to keep some friends or to stay close to family members or co-workers. Are you willing to pay that price?

Will you rise to the challenge of following Christ, even if unity is hard to achieve?⁸

It is easy to be confused by the idea of Jesus becoming human, of God becoming flesh, what theologians call the Incarnation. We can look at the world around us, lovingly created by God and not see the truth. We can consume without stopping to appreciate that everything we touch, from the flower in the courtyard, to the hand of a loved one, was in some manner created lovingly by God.⁹

If we recognize our blessings we become united in Christ. If we recognize our blessings, we become all in for Christ.

It is a hard, and yet fulfilling choice to follow Jesus on the terms he has laid out for us. We have to move beyond the comfortable teachings of the world: to be focused on money and luxuries. Now, as Fr. Roman noted last week, we enjoy the world's luxuries. I myself had the very best taco salad this week with some of you.

The truth is that our natural reaction to faith, to our one true God, is that we take part in him. Think of this: we are in Chapter 6 of John. In the following chapters, Jesus will perform miracles. He will heal. Then, he will be brought to the cross and he will die for each one of us. He will be crucified to exemplify the fact that each of our sins is forgiven. This is an act of true love.

⁴ This unity is again, reflected in Ephesians as we see the language reflecting mutual submission. Jesus is telling us to love him, to find a way to be one with him and submit to his will within our lives. For more on this, see: Dylan's Blog lectionary. https://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2006/08/proper_16_year_.html

⁵ This idea comes from: <https://youtu.be/3wPK4ILxxRA>

⁶ "Gospel that the name of Judas is mentioned. To name Judas at this moment is significant because the reference is located in the midst of language of intimacy and relationship. Twice these verses call attention to the Twelve, the Twelve Jesus chose, and that Judas was one of the Twelve. The one who betrays Jesus is not a nondescript someone who happens upon Jesus sometime in his ministry." From Lewis, Karoline. Minneapolis: Fortress.

⁷

⁸ Again, see Dylan's lectionary Blog on this topic.

https://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2006/08/proper_16_year_.html

⁹ Consider this idea: "Loye Bradley Ashton, in his contribution to the Feasting on the Word series, suggests that the problem here is the lack of a proper understanding of the Incarnation—that we seem to confuse "the body as flesh without spirit with the body as incarnate, flesh with spirit." Because of this confusion, we tend to consume "the world without appreciating how God has infused creation with the Spirit; thus we use and discard it in crude and materialist ways," which includes the way we treat our environment and the way we treat each other." Farr, Curtis. (2022) *Sermons that Work*. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/gifts-of-god-proper-16-b-2018/>

And it is only human that we react with devotion, yet that does not mean the path is easy.¹⁰

The way we respond to Jesus is important because it indicates the way we live in Christ. The way we love him, because of what he did. Look at this passage both metaphorically and historically.

Metaphorically, because Jesus is giving bread and not a piece of his arm, and historically as he was teaching his disciples. These are the twelve that are left. These are the devoted few. They are the ones Jesus is instructing and their message is carried on to the church today.¹¹

We have two choices: in for Jesus or in for the world.

Two choices: the worldly path of comfort and power or the less followed path of devotion.

Now, think of worldly leaders, those who recently have emerged who have less of an emphasis on their faith life. It is clear there is something missing. Think of leaders who have a clear connection to faith, in them we see joy, we see abundant life manifested on earth.¹²

When we live in the way of the abundant bread, of being one with Christ, we are able to be more compassionate. We put our neighbors first, because they too are part of Christ. We find joy more easily, because we see the blessings in life.¹³

This decision between leaving and staying with Jesus is brought forth at the end of today's gospel. Earlier in John chapter 6 Jesus fed 5,000 people. Huge crowds followed him. Some called him a prophet, which Israel had not had in over 400 years. They even sought to crown Jesus as King. Jesus had the admiration of huge crowds who wanted nothing more than to give him more power.

That all changed when Jesus started offending people with his teaching about eating his flesh. Now near the end of John's gospel the author tells us that, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him."

So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" This is another way of saying, Are you all in for me, or are you out?

Then Peter opens his mouth, while often in the gospels, gets him into trouble. Yet he says these beautiful words, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

In other words, "We are all in for Jesus." Even if everyone else has already left.

This is the same faith I see in our parish today. Even though we might be tired. Even though it might take training. We might have to walk before we can run. It might take years of practice. Still, we are going to follow Christ. We do this

¹⁰The idea of gratitude as a reaction comes from: Pearson, Bertie. (2022). *Sermons that Work*. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/giving-thanks-pentecost-13-b-august-22-2021/>

¹¹ Wright, Tom (2002). *John for Everyone: Part One*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.90-91.

¹² Two thoughts on this text: first, the idea genuinely comes from Farr. Curtis. (2022) *Sermons that Work*. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/gifts-of-god-proper-16-b-2018/>. Second, when comparing world leaders, I would challenge you to look at Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of South Africa. He is both theologically sound and lives a joyful life.

¹³ Farr. Curtis. (2022) *Sermons that Work*. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/gifts-of-god-proper-16-b-2018/>

because we know that Peter was right. Jesus has the words of eternal life. When we follow this difficult path it is the way to peace, truth, and love.

May we be all in for Jesus. Amen.