

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B
August 23, 2009
The Reverend Amy Hodges Morehous

“Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve”

We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord.

We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord.

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,

Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

~ Peter Scholte

“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.”

Throughout this chapter of John, Jesus presents his disciples with a choice - a chance to enter into the holy mystery of his presence. He offers to live in them, as they live in him – to be one in the Spirit.

The disciples find it offensive, all this talk of eating flesh and drinking blood. Who wouldn't? It sounds completely bizarre. “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” Indeed, some turn away from Christ, reject him and return to their homes. But I don't think we should be so hard on them, these “discipleship dropouts”. We ourselves know what it is to turn away from Christ.

When have we turned away from Christ? Any of us, in a moment of weakness, or in a time of stress, have made choices that take us away from Christ, that divide us from God. I know that I've grieved the heart of God on more than one occasion. Maybe I passed by someone in need, and I looked the other way. Maybe we've spoken harsh words to someone we love. Or we've heard hard words from someone else – words that wound, words

that were bigoted, hateful or untruthful, and we've remained silent. Because we are human, we are often tempted to take the easy way, the path of least resistance.

I am not suggesting that God is present in our lives ONLY when we shape up and fly right – when we are perfect people. Far from it! We are a community – a world – full of imperfect people. Every child of God is loved and treasured equally - always. God is a parent, and parents wish nothing more than to remain in loving relationship with their children. But the choices we children make – the ordinary, everyday choices – conspire to keep God at a safe distance. We are the ones who put limits on our relationship with God – God doesn't do that. We do that. We shy away from loving God freely and deeply, from committing fully, because we finite people find it almost impossible to believe that in an infinite God who loves us madly and deeply, just the way we are. We stumble at the idea of God's immeasurable grace, and trip over our own needs, fears, shortcomings, and desires.

But even in the midst of our very human-ness, with our frailties and foibles – we are all here this morning because we are free and able to do so, and we have CHOSEN to be here. You woke up, you weren't ill or infirm, and made a bold and conscious choice. You're not playing golf, or at a soccer game, or sleeping in. You're here in search of something, called by Someone, searching for the Holy. You may be here for reasons even you don't understand. But you're here, in the midst of this community, to participate in the holy mystery of communion, to listen to the Word, and to join together with the family of God.

Our lives are full of those choices – those small decisions we make every hour of every day. Those choices can lead us into closer relationship with God – or can push God away.

But what about the times when our choices are taken away from us?

Those are usually life-altering times. Sometimes even times of darkness. We live in a world that knows the presence of evil – knows it well. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch says to his son Jem: "There's a lot of ugly things in this world, son. I wish I could keep them all away from you. That's never possible." Sometimes our lives are unalterably touched by those ugly things – and we face something beyond our understanding. Maybe we or those we know and love have fallen into darkness. We may be wounded, ill, or grieving, or facing a time of despair – we may be facing something so difficult that we see no hope it.

Even in those times, perhaps especially in those times, we are a people with choices. We can always turn toward the one God, who never deserts us, even in the darkest of places. We can reach out our hands to our community, to our friends, and our family, and ask for

their help and understanding. We turn to scripture, and hear the words of Ephesians, and we look toward truth, righteousness, and the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. We can hear the Psalmist sing of despair, and redemption. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and will save those whose spirits are crushed.” In whatever struggles we find ourselves, we can choose to be continually renewed by sharing in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, to bring us closer to the life that God wants for each of us.

However we’ve gotten here, whatever our circumstance, Jesus invites us to do far more than receive provision for our needs, and calm for our fears. Jesus isn’t asking for a transaction – a deed for a deed; you give me this, I’ll give you that. Jesus asks us to share his life in the deepest possible way. He wants us to be one with him as he and the Father are one. He shares our flesh; and wants us to share his. He does not merely want to improve our lives, he wants to BE our life. He wants to love us, and us to love him so exclusively, so deeply that we can say, "the life I live is not my own, but Christ, living in me."

We hear the very vulnerable question Jesus asks of the disciples – a question he also asks of each of us. “Do you also wish to go away?” In Jesus’ question we can hear our freedom. We are always free to reject God. We are free to accept Christ’s offer, but then hold him at a distance, something to be pulled out, and dusted off politely on holy days, or maybe seen to when we have time in the midst of our busy lives. Or we can choose daily to walk down the difficult road, allowing God free reign in our lives – allowing God to lead and direct us down that road, even though we know not where it leads.

There is much that is challenging and costly moving forward together on that road, but it is what we were created to do, and it is the way to full, eternal, and abundant life. Christ asks us if we want to make a leap of faith, if we want to step out boldly into a more full, more trusting relationship with him, and with God.

When we take that leap, we are never alone. ~ *Amen*