

Sermon Proper 16 B

St. John's Church, Jamaica Plain

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I taught World Religions at Bunker Hill Community College for many years, and I remember a student who was quite taken with what he was learning about Christianity. He stopped me after class one day and said, "You know, I would really like to believe this, if you could just prove it to me!" I laughed and told him that's why we call it faith! Because, we can't prove what we say. We believe what we say. And there's the difference.

Today we have a classic story about the limits of proof and faith. Jesus is giving a sermon among his own people in Capernaum. Jesus tells them he is sent down from God like manna from heaven, like living bread. That those who eat this bread will live for ever. Now I've had someone object to my sermons. I even had someone walk out on me once. But can you imagine what faced Jesus in this sermon? Imagine saying something so audacious. His listeners grumbled, the gospel tells us. And well they might. This is amazing. What is this he's telling us, they want to know.

Even many of his disciples who had traveled around with him, and felt drawn to his message of love and forgiveness, even they were seriously

put off by this sermon. "This is a hard saying," they said. This is really hard to believe. What's up with him today? "Who can listen to it?", they asked themselves. And then Jesus said: "You think this is hard? What if I were to speak about the Son of Man ascending?" And his disciples listened in shock. Some of these disciples may have followed him for just a short while, a few months, maybe, the winter season. Others for a longer time, perhaps a year or more. They had walked with him across the Galilee, sat with him at the shores of the lake, eaten with him. Thought this one might be the ONE, the prophet from God. But not today. Not this message. This is over the top. "I'm out of here," they said. Many of his disciples, the gospel says. **Many**.

These were people Jesus trusted. Friends and companions who shared his ministry and his life, who had resonated with his words, thrilled at his miracles. But not today. And so Jesus, perhaps sadly, perhaps with some concern, turns to the twelve. He asks them point blank: "Do you also wish to go away?" Have you ever had to ask that question of someone you love? someone you shared a deep friendship with? an intimate? a trusted colleague? "Are you going to leave me? Are you walking away, too? "

And Peter answers for the twelve. "To whom shall we go?" We are yours now. We have come to know you. We trust you. We love you. No

words of yours, no matter how troubling, how confusing, can send us away from you. For it is only with you that we choose to abide. Here is our Christian life! It is about being with Jesus Christ. Living with him, traveling with him, entrusting ourselves to him. When we understand what he is saying and when we don't. When we are secure and content and when we are puzzled and frightened. When things seem easy or when they are hopelessly hard. With a road map and without a road map. Where else would we go?

But they can only say this to Jesus because they have come to know him. Their lived experience of him grounds their life. And we are like them. We choose Jesus and our experience of him. Not a particular teaching, or way of doing things. Our Christian life grows out of our prayer, our encounter with the living Christ in word and sacrament, on the streets of Boston, in the faces of those we meet and love and work with and even those we fear. Our Christian life is rooted in our knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, fed in sharing here one bread and one cup. We stay with Jesus because we have come to know him and want to know him more and want to live with him in this life and in the life to come. Whether we understand or not. Whether it's clear or confusing. Whatever.....wherever.....whenever. As long as we know that we are walking with Jesus, walking home to God.

Can you commit your life to him today? Can you come to this altar to eat the living bread and say to Jesus: “Yes. I am with you.”

Today we are welcoming into this community Abigail Sophie. Her parents and godparents will make promises in her name and we will renew our own commitment to Christ. We will say to Christ. “Yes, I am with you. Where else would I go?”