

# PILGRIM

## CHURCH

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

### ASSIGNING LOYALTY

John 6:56-69 August 23, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Loyalty – to be faithful to, to defend, to support, to be true to.

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” The verb “Meno” is at the heart of this saying of Jesus. It expresses the interrelatedness of Jesus and the believer that is the source of the believers life. “Meno” – it means “to abide.” Jesus is explaining that just as God sent the bread to the Hebrew people in the wilderness, God has sent him. The difference is that the bread in the wilderness would feed one’s hunger. Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus brings eternal life. And it is bound up in this understanding of our relationship with Jesus. Some of the disciples took exception to this saying. “What a hard saying. Who can accept it?” Hard saying because it broke a basic understanding, a basic law – one cannot eat the flesh of a human. And one cannot drink blood of anything. The protesting disciples do not rightly perceive the flesh of which Jesus speaks. They see only Jesus – this man in the flesh. They do not understand, they do not see “the word made flesh.” It is the Spirit that gives life to the flesh, and that Spirit dwells in the Son of Man. Spirit and flesh must be held together – that is the heart of the incarnation. We say of Jesus, “God became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus was not God. What was God about Jesus was this life giving spirit of God in him.

The early church fathers were split on whether this passage is a sacramental passage or not. The group in Alexandria see the whole chapter here in John as a parable of faith in Christ. But there were Latin and Greek Fathers who see the chapter as a eucharistic passage.

If we were to use this passage today to talk about communion, we would realize that the church struggles with this idea of God’s grace given to all. The church has many times given the ministers the authority to say who can receive the sacrament. The Roman Church to this day believes that when the priest elevates the host in the service that the bread literally becomes body and the wine, blood – in other words The Bread of Life. Others believe that this Bread of Life is given along with the symbols of bread and wine.

I think Jesus is using a metaphor here, but it is lost on those dissenting disciples. Metaphor – a word used for one thing that is applied to another. They did not dissent when Jesus used the metaphor, “I am the door.” But this idea of eating flesh and drinking blood is beyond their comprehension. He is asking them to feed on him – they must absorb his teaching

Until his mind becomes their mind.

Until his character becomes their character.

Until his ways become their ways.

They must be so much like Jesus that they ask themselves, what would Christ do if her were in my place.

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The text says that many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. It is a thinning of the ranks. There was always a day – early in fall practice – when coach planned a practice that was designed to see

who really wanted to be loyal to the football team. It was a rough day. Sure enough, the next day, there were several who had decided that football was not for them. Coach would always say, “Well, let’s see who we have left that will give their all to this team.” Loyalty. It means faithfulness to those persons, ideals that one is under obligation to defend, to support to be true.

The Minister of Defense is questioning Harry Potter.

“What is Dumbledore up to? Where does he go when he leaves the school?”

“No idea,” replies Harry.

“And you wouldn’t tell me if you knew, would you.”

“No, I wouldn’t,” says Harry.

“Dumbledore’s man through and through aren’t you, Potter?”

“Yes, I am,” replies Harry. Glad we straightened that out.”

Loyalty.

It was a first class letter. It was from a school from which I had a degree. I opened the letter and the school was asking for money. They called it “The Loyalty fund.” Of course, we want to be loyal to our school. They knew how to ask for money.

We assign loyalty, priority to people, issues that are important and meaningful in our lives. Our loyalties change, don’t they. We get involved in a cause and it consumes our time and money – we are loyal to it. That also happens with friends, neighbors. We move to a new neighborhood and we have a new set of friends and neighbors. We try to remain loyal to old friends, and we manage to that with some all of our lives. But we find ourselves assigning loyalty depending on where we are in our life. Our causes change with the times to be relevant to our lives and the life our community and world. We add new friends. But our loyalty to some friends remains with us throughout our lives. We make time to keep that meaningful relationship alive. They are always a part of us.

Jesus asks the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” The popular thing to answer might have been, “Yes.” But it is Simon Peter who answers for the twelve. Yeah, Peter, the one who is all over the place. Remember the Caesarea-Phillipi incident? For over half of his gospel, Mark has literally drug the disciples to the understanding that Jesus is the mighty son of God. Jesus. Jesus asks them, “Who do the people say that I am” “Well, they say your are Elijah, John the Baptist, or one of the prophets.” That is good company. Then Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” It is Peter who answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” And then, immediately after Mark has Peter identify Jesus as the mighty Son of God, Jesus begins to teach the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and be killed on the cross. Again, it is Peter, “Now Jesus, you’ve got to quit all that kind of talk. Just stop it.

“Do you also wish to go away?” Peter answers, “Lord, to who can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” He is saying, “Jesus, we will be loyal to you, we will be faithful to you. You are the one that brings us life.”

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Loyalty. Becoming like Jesus. I remember an old gospel song from my childhood. “Can the world see Jesus in you? Can the world see Jesus in me. Does your love for him ring true, and your life and service too, can the world see Jesus in you?”

Let us be loyal to this Spirit of God that was in Christ that also abides in us.