

Sunday Thought

22nd August 2021 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

1 Kings 8:1,6,10-11, 22 - 30, 41 - 43

Psalm 84

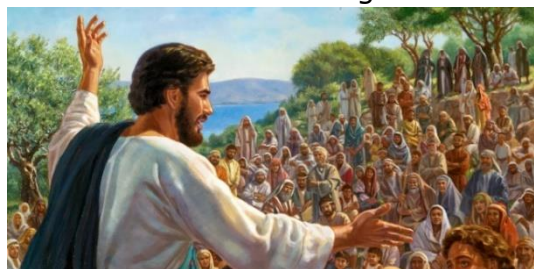
Ephesians 6: 10 - 20

John 6: 56 - 69

Where Are They Now?

We have witnessed distressing events this past week – the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban and another major earthquake in Haiti. There have, of course, been more welcome scenes of sport, entertainment, and family reunions with the easing of pandemic regulations. In very different ways we may all be left asking a similar question, *'What about all the people we knew before our crisis? Where are they now?'* For some the answer will be a simple follow-up phone-call but for others it may well be a grim life or death reply.

I wanted to ask the same question when I thought about today's Gospel reading. It involves a critical moment in Jesus' new universal Kingdom ministry. His teaching had become more pointed, more challenging, more heart-searching as he now openly declared himself as sent by God and on a different wavelength to most of the current religious leaders. Great crowds had welcomed him because



his message was relevant to their questions and needs. They appreciated his friendship, his miracles, his attention to individual life-problems and questions, Now, he was challenging them to be serious about their faith and to be in earnest for God's Kingdom. They in turn, challenged him. *'You're going*

too far!' they told him. *'The miracles and stories are great but there's no need to upset the age-old traditions upheld by our religious leaders. You speak of new life in God through your own life. We don't all need this intense spiritual, even mystical approach to faith. We are human!'* Interest in Jesus began to wane. The crowds became smaller. Jesus accepted the situation. He told them that only by believing his words and entering new life in God's Spirit could they ever really understand and share the life of God.

At this point it became *crunch time* for the close disciples – the twelve he had chosen. *'What about you?'* He asked them. *'Are you going to join those who are leaving? Or are you, like others, intending to follow me at a distance?'* I love Peter's affirmative response on behalf of them all, *'Lord, who else would we follow? What would our life be without you now? We believe you and your words are the means to having eternal life. We are sure you are God's Holy One! We're not going back. We're with you all the way!'*

So, now there were two groups of followers – those prepared to risk financial loss, reputation, friendship, even life, by staying close to Jesus - and those who were better pleased to follow at a safe distance where the pleasant things were happening. Hence my question, *'Where are they now?'* We know the answer as far as it refers to those close to him. They were men – and women - who would stay with him, following his path to the Cross and on from his resurrection and ascension to the powerful life of his Spirit through whom they would straightway be working to build his Kingdom. Many would follow Jesus, suffering and giving their lives in its service. *What of the others?* I like to think that many of them did come to accept Jesus and his words and claim him as Lord and God. Among them would be followers who established the first churches in Galilee and Judaea, but many would still be following *at a distance*.

Now I bring my question forward to present times and to the contemporary church. *Where are the front-line workers? Our prophets, teachers, preachers, pastors, lovers of the loveless and the unlovely?* Every church is set in a community where people need bread, comfort, healing, friendship and to know and share the excitement of a world being transformed by the love of God. *What about the others who still follow at a spiritual distance – uncommitted – not ready to risk being close to Jesus?* They will be with us - necessary folk who help us maintain the property, sing the hymns, make tea and cakes but maybe there is a greater risk there – of missing the joy and thrill of the front-line? We must pray for more to move up the ranks to front line work and prayer for a *Kingdom World'*; *people who live closer to Jesus, in the 'thin' place between earth and heaven where life is risky; people who live under a cross-shaped shadow – wearing the armour of God which Paul describes in the Ephesians reading today; people who believe our world of war, hatred, brutality and carelessness needs to be afraid of the Gospel. Yes, fearful of the power of God's love and the onward and upward moving of his Spirit in Jesus.*

And me – post pandemic. Where am I now?

A Prayer (using 1 King's 8; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20)

In God's House Together

Lord God, you are great beyond imagining.
Too great to be contained in people-made buildings;
Yet you meet us in our place of worship.
We love to be there, welcomed by your forgiving grace;
honouring you with songs of joyous praise;
learning and deepening our faith in you;
finding new strength for daily life;
knowing that you hear and answer our prayers;
welcoming people of all ages, races and cultures;
aiding the distressed and needy with Jesus;
and bringing others to share with us your full and forever life.



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