

Then what do you think of the meaning of being a disciple of Christ?

It is time to make "the turning point" in our ministry and our life. It is time to stand up, to move, and to be involved in any kind of ministry at the church. It is time to make a difference. We can make a difference.

This morning Simon Peter confesses, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (68-69) Like Peter, when we confess that Jesus is the Holy One of God, and when we realize that there is no one else to whom we can go, and who listens to the words of eternal life, we will see his glory and we will rejoice!

January 7, 2018

NEW BEGINNING (1): **The Turning Point**

John 6:56-69

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Today's gospel reading marks a turning point in the response of the people to Jesus. Most of the people who come out to see Him turn away from Him. Up to this point Jesus has been a popular man. He has been the hero of Galilee, the miracle worker, the healer, the wise man, and the man so close to God. But now, Jesus tells them that the bread and fish that he gave them to eat will only satisfy them for a day, but that his flesh and blood will satisfy them forever. And he continues to tell them that he is the bread of heaven God has prepared for them. After listening to Jesus' words, they leave him. In verse 26, Jesus said, "*Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.*" It is a difficult teaching to accept that Jesus is the bread of heaven and that through him comes eternal life for all who believe in him and who follow him.

We find people who have the words of faith well planted in their knowledge, but no conviction, no passion, no commitment in their hearts. They have the outward form of faith, but they don't have the substance of faith and the power of spirituality. We are not called to be a people who follow Jesus only when it suits our taste, our understanding, or our desires. We are called to be with the Lord and to serve him and to be blessed by him in good times and hard times and in the times that are easy and the times when it is not easy.

Let me tell you a story: At the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 the sport of canoe racing was added to the list of international competitions. The favorite team in the four-man canoe race was the United States team. One member of that team was a young man by the name of Bill Havens. As the time for the Olympics

neared, it became clear that Bill's wife would give birth to her first child about the time that Bill would be competing in the Paris Games. In 1924 there were no jet airliners from Paris to the United States, only slow-moving ocean-going ships. And so Bill found himself in a dilemma. Should he go to Paris and risk not being at his wife's side when their first child was born? Or should he withdraw from the team and remain behind? Bill's wife insisted that he go to Paris. After all, he had been working towards this for many years. It was the culmination of a life-long dream. Clearly the decision was not easy for Bill to make.

Finally, Bill decided to withdraw from the competition and remain behind with his wife. Bill considered being at her side a higher priority than going to Paris to fulfill a life-long dream. Anyway, the United States four-man canoe team won the gold medal at the Paris Olympics. And Bill's wife was late in giving birth to her first child. She was so late that Bill could have competed in the event and returned home in time to be with her when she gave birth. People said, "What a shame." But Bill said he had no regrets. After all, his commitment to his wife was more important.

The story of Bill Havens is a story of how one man paid a high price to fulfill a commitment to someone he loved. This story illustrates the kind of commitment that God in Christ has to us. It is certainly a story that shows how we should be committed to him in return.

In today's Gospel lesson we see people who leave Jesus because they wanted free food and a free lunch. They didn't want spiritual food that would do nothing for their hungry guts. Others cannot believe that God would send spiritual food through a person as plain as Jesus whom they knew and had grown up with. Others did not want God to get that close to them. They wanted to run their own lives rather than let God live and work through them. Like so many people today they did not want to give control of their lives over to God.

Jesus asked the Twelve "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" (67). Then Jesus asks us for a commitment. He asks us to be faithful to him as he is faithful to us in the good times of our lives as well as in the bad. In his asking Jesus does not compromise. He does not water down his message so that it will be easier for us. He does not change the truth so that his disciples will not leave him. What Jesus does is to proclaim what he came to proclaim. He comes to offer to us a choice, the choice to live with him in his care and under his love or to live without him and without the peace, the joy, and the strength that a relationship with him offers.

Let me continue to tell the outcome to the story of Bill Havens. The child eventually born to Bill and his wife was a boy, whom they named Frank. Twenty-eight years later, in 1952, Bill received a cablegram from Frank. It was sent from Helsinki, Finland, where the 1952 Olympics were being held. The cablegram read, and I quote it exactly: "Dad, I won. I'm bringing home the gold medal you lost while waiting for me to be born." Frank Havens had just won the gold medal for the United States in the canoe-racing event, a medal his father had dreamed of winning but never did.

There is an outcome to our acts of commitment - our commitments to one another and our commitment to God. When we stand firm, when we refuse to compromise, when we sacrifice for the sake of the promises we have made, for the sake of those to whom we have pledged our love, for the sake of our relationship to God, we reap the abundant harvest of righteousness and we reap a harvest of joy and peace that endures forever.

Do you love this church, the body of Christ? Then how much do you love this church? Are you proud to be a member of this church? Then how many times do you think of the future of this church? Have you ever thought of our church 10 years or 20 years later from now? If we sit back and wait for somebody to act and to do our ministry, we cannot expect any hope or vision for the future in our ministry. Are you thankful to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?