

Newington Methodist Church

Church Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, ME9 7JT

News and views for the week commencing 22nd August 2021

The words I have spoken to you
are spirit and life

John 6: 63



Notices

- **Sunday service on 22nd August in the church will be local arrangement, led by Jenny Gilbert. Next Sunday's service 29th August will be led by LP Elena Markova.**
- **Sunday 22nd August circuit live stream service 10:30** will be led by Rev Tony Graff. Follow the link: <https://youtu.be/7WtIFk88d1Y>
The next Sunday circuit live stream, 29th August, will be led by Julien Myles..

Dates for your Diary:

- **Change of Sunday morning worship time !!!!** From September 2021 Newington Sunday service will start 9:30 am.
- **Coffee morning**, Saturday 4th September 10-12 am
- **Sunday 5th September** - outdoor service at 10.30 - in the orchard next door to St Mary's - to celebrate Climate Sunday. You are all very welcome to join us. It will be in the same style that the Pentecost service has been. There is to be an external speaker - Rev Sarah Chapman - who was the priest at The Living Well before she retired.

People and places for prayer

- Prayers for all who are unwell and taking medical treatment.
- We remember our friends who have died and their loved ones: Audrey, Margaret S.

Please send news, prayer requests and any other contributions for inclusion in the weekly newsletter to robert.zachar@gmail.com

Bank details for Offerings: Newington Methodist Church, HSBC Sittingbourne.

Sort Code 40 – 42 – 04, Account 70614696.

If you prefer to send a cheque contact our church treasurer Chris Chare.

"Hard teachings"

A reflection on John 6:56-69 for Sunday 22 August (Ordinary Time 21B)
by Gillian Collins

If you've been following these reflections over the last few weeks, you'd be forgiven for thinking the Lectionary has crashed and got stuck on John, around chapter 6. Imagine a coloured beach ball endlessly whirling, or whatever the equivalent may be on your device...

Why are we spending so long on this section of John's gospel? Well, the answer could be that John, and also those who compiled the Lectionary, view this central section of his writing as the core teaching on who Jesus is and how we are to understand his relationship to God the Father and to us. But much of it is hard teaching, not only for us today (and for preachers doing their best to communicate the key messages), but also for the people around Jesus at the time, including the Jewish teachers of religion and even his own closest disciples.

To attract people to a project, you don't usually start by trying to put them off. We want people to come to know Jesus, to join us within his community. The last thing we want is to frighten them off. *"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"* (John 6:60) At this stage in his ministry and teaching, Jesus seems determined to drive away as many as possible. What could be the point?

Just as a reminder, at the opening of John 6, we are with a crowd so large that Jesus's disciples can't imagine how they could feed so many. Jesus transforms the gift of one boy's lunch to feed a hungry mass and there are twelve baskets left over. The implication: in his bounty, there is no limit to God's power and generosity, and it is his will to provide for all the world's needs. Yet at the end of the same chapter, Jesus has only 12 followers left. Hardly an example of successful church-growth! But then he gives even the last 12 disciples an opportunity to walk away: *"You're not thinking of leaving too, are you?" Jesus asked the Twelve*.

But this is more than an invitation to walk away. It's a call to commitment and a moment of decision. Today we are often wary of presenting the demands and challenges of Christ to enquirers and newcomers to our fellowship because we don't want to scare them off. Perhaps an example is the decreasing emphasis placed on church membership, which once used to be taken so seriously that those who had "backslidden" (great word!) could have their class membership ticket withdrawn and would have to earn it back over time by better behaviour and devotion.

That's not the way of Jesus here. His words are difficult for many people in this crowd to understand and harder still to follow: *"If you eat my flesh and drink my blood you abide in me, and I abide in you."* Our own feelings of distaste at this language of flesh and blood, (which some people still find intensely difficult and distasteful when they encounter it in the service of Communion), can be as nothing compared to how his Jewish hearers would have heard it. The Jewish rules about eating flesh and drinking blood were deep in their culture, so this would be profoundly shocking for them. Blood, in particular, is holy and must always be offered to God in ritual. Such

rules still govern the Jewish approach to the eating of meat, which must be separated from blood in the manner known as kosher. This was a hard saying, and completely unacceptable for them. This man must be a blasphemer. How could God want anything like this?

Like many people today, they fail to see past the literal meaning of the words and into the deeper significance. Flesh and blood: just think about it. It's what all of us are made of, and what binds us together in common humanity. It's there in everyday language: more than flesh and blood can stand; your own flesh and blood...

The words about taking in flesh and blood refer to the way Christ invites us to take him into ourselves, to allow him to become part of our own being, our own body.

"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Jesus knows that many of the crowd are there to find out what he can offer. He makes claims that will force them to make up their minds. Would they stick with the teachings of their old religion or go with his radical new message, offensive as it seems to be? If this had happened in the modern age, we can imagine the shock and concern that would radiate from these words, and in moments set the worldwide media ablaze with rumour, misunderstanding and hate speech.

But Jesus is making a rational offer. Choose now! His listeners would recognise echoes of Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy. After setting out clearly the options before the people – obedience which leads to "life and prosperity," or disobedience, leading to "death and destruction" – Moses finally sums up: these are the only two choices available to you; obedience or disobedience. Moses urges the Israelites to *"choose life, so that you and your children may live."*

So with Jesus, the moment of decision has come. When his talk gets tough, the people drift away. His call sets forth clearly his expectation for those who would journey further with him, and sorts out those who are only there out of curiosity. Now, Jesus turns to the twelve and asks his pointed question: *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* It is a make-up-your-mind moment of a lifetime! Authentic disciples cannot walk away from Jesus.

Peter answers for the twelve, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"*. Peter sees what the crowd cannot see that day. He realises that Jesus Christ is the only option worth having and decides to "choose life", and this for now is enough. Though there would later come a time when Peter would deny the Lord and go his own way for a while, the reality is that even then he could never really walk away again.

Each of us is called from time to time to re-examine our own commitment to Christ. It may be in the Covenant service once a year, or day by day in our own reading and prayer times, or when our attention is caught by some news item or words of conversation.

What about you, says Jesus? Surely, *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"*

Amen

A prayer based on Ephesians 6: 10-20 (with thanks to ffctideas.org.uk and Christian Aid)

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God

Fasten the belt of truth around your waist

Lord, in today's world

It can be so tempting not to tell the truth.

People want to get themselves out of trouble,

Or make themselves look good;

So they tell lies for all kinds of reasons.

We pray for those who work in government

Or in big businesses.

Help them to set high standards of truthfulness,

And to set a good example,

So that people may trust what they say.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness

We pray for the church everywhere.

May those who worship You

Reflect the love and goodness of Jesus,

So that when people look at His followers,

They may see what He is like.

As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace

The word 'gospel' means good news,

And so we pray for those who bring us the news;

For reporters working in dangerous places

So that we can learn what is happening

All round the world.

We pray for those who work in television

Or for the newspapers.

Make them sensitive in their treatment of others,

And honest in their reporting.

We pray, too, for those who go out

To preach the good news of Jesus.

May they be filled with Your Holy Spirit,

So that their message may be clear and truthful.

Take the shield of faith

Faith means that we look ahead to what we cannot see.

So we pray for those whose work involves looking ahead.

We think of teachers,
Who may never see the results of their work;
For Sunday school teachers and youth workers
Who may not learn of the growing faith
Of those whom they have taught.

We pray too for gardeners who plant for the future;
And we remember those who have been waiting
For a long time for answers to prayer.
Help them to put their trust in You,
And not to give up because they do not see quick results.

Take the helmet of salvation
As we do so, we pray for those
Whose work involves ensuring people's safety.
We pray for fire-fighters, and the police;
For our armed forces, involved with peace-keeping missions.

We pray for mountain rescue teams;
For crews of lifeboats, for lifeguards
And for coast guards.
Keep them safe as they risk their lives for others.

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
Lord, we thank You that once upon a time,
Somebody took the trouble to tell us about Jesus.

Help us to be ready with our story of what He means to us,
So that we may tell others about Him
When You give us the opportunity.

Pray in the Spirit at all times
Lord we pray for those around the world who are hungry, who are displaced, who are frightened.
We pray in particular for the peoples of Afghanistan and Haiti,

Pray also for me,
And for ourselves and for those we know who are struggling, who are lonely, the bereaved, those
who can see no way forward.

Hold us all in your unfailing love.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself of all but love in order to bring life in all
its fullness.

AMEN