

August 23 , 2015

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

I have heard this Gospel story characterized as one in which Jesus is telling the bloody truth. If you were a British congregation you would undoubtedly be deeply shocked that I would use such language particularly in a church, let alone from the pulpit. The American culture is a little more accepting of the word bloody but I use the word as if this was a British congregation.

Our Lord was driving at the heart of Jewish sensitivities in using the language he did. He could not be more direct.

From The Old Testament Book of Leviticus Chapter 17, a book that every Jewish citizen worth his salt knew by heart:

"No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off."

"*Shall be cut off*"...meaning of course they will be cut off from any relationship with God.

In light of this widely known scripture, is it any wonder that many of his followers turned their backs on Jesus and took off...who knows to where?

The faithful 12 however hung in with Jesus, because they had that conviction in their hearts, that level of faith that Jesus Christ was and is the only answer simply put to go anywhere else is to court disaster.

In the early 2000s in Northern California there lived a woman in her mid fifties. The lady was highly talented, had written and published her own novels and even wrote the screenplay and directed her own movie. The woman was highly creative and really saw the world as her oyster'.she thought that any idea in her head could be turned into reality through her energy and knowledge. There was only one flaw in her plan and that was she had insufficient funding to match her ambitions.

This woman had experienced some sense of a faithbut the persons she associated would certainly not have been able to relate to the words "faith in Jesus Christ".

A good portion of the Book of Leviticus that I referred to previously and with which all devout Jews were familiar concerns itself with what to do with the blood and body parts of sacrificial animals.

When animals were sacrificed to God in the rituals that are carefully laid out in Leviticus, various portions of the carcass were given back to the person making the offering, given to the priests to consume, or burned on the Altar and totally given over to God.

But, the same thing always happened with the blood: it was always given to God. Usually it was poured onto the Altar directly. Why? Because God considered it holy. And God considered it holy because it was the blood of the animal that embodied its very life.

The life force of the creature is its blood.

Because God is the giver of all life, life is holy. Life is sacred. And it's not to be misused or mistreated—and certainly not consumed.

It belongs to God, and God alone.

So, when Jesus says that his followers are to drink his blood, what he's saying in the ancient biblical language of Leviticus is: take my life, and pour it into your bodies, your lives, your souls.

And by pouring his eternal-life-blood into our life, we then are the recipients of eternal life ourselves.

Because Jesus' life is coursing in our veins.

Back in Northern California the lady in her early fifties allowed her fanciful ideas to get away from her and she incurred enormous personal debt. She had to raise a lot of money very quickly.....

Note that in Northern California, marijuana is as common as ragweed in Illinois. So the idea emerged of obtaining investors, purchasing large quantities of marijuana and transporting the substance across state lines to designated customers in various parts of the Midwest.

The lady made three trips in her RV covering thousands of miles delivering the goods and paying down her debt. So far so good.

The third trip while traveling through Illinois, the lady gets stopped by the State Police. She is sentenced to six years in the Illinois State Penitentiary.....and so began her walk through the burning coals of hell on earth.

The talented, creative writer and producer from the beauty of the coast of Northern California is now locked up for six years and with family and friends more than 3,000 miles away. She is at her last gasp.....at the end of her rope.

Taking the liberty of adapting the words of Simon Peter "Lord, to whom can I go? You have the words of eternal life. I may have come to believe and I now think I know that you are the Holy One of God."

Almost four years later, Trinity Church in Aurora received a call from the Rector of St John's Episcopal Church in Decatur Illinois.. There is a lady being transferred from the Penitentiary in Decatur to the Work Release Program in Aurora, Illinois who claims to be an Episcopalian and could we possibly make contact with her and support her.

Within John's Gospel today, Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe"..... And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

I believe that Faith in Jesus Christ does not remain at a constant level through one's life as a believer. The disciples were severely tested on many occasions ...including today's encounter with the apparent clash with established Jewish tradition. The twelve passed the test many others did not.

The lady transferred to the work release program discovered that the work release program was an even greater test of her faith because the correctional officers and the rules at the work release center in some ways were harder than at the Penitentiary. The walk through the red hot coals continued to be almost unbearable

Then the lady came to Trinity Episcopal Church and almost immediately fell in love with the church and the Community. Her hereto restrained love and faith in Jesus Christ poured out of the closet where it had been lying in wait for so many years.

As time went by the lady became spiritually closer and closer to Trinity and the same answer came to Suza as had come to Simon Peter all those years ago.....when Simon Peter said "Lord, to whom can we go?.....Simon Peter realized that you Lord Jesus have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Suza returned to her home in Northern California just a couple of weeks ago and we miss her profoundly....but I believe her life has been inexorably changed by her whole experience concluding finding the love of Jesus Christ. Suza was a regular member of our Wednesday Bible Study for a short time, but after she left one member likened her to a fleeting angelic presence. I conveyed those words to Suza and we received the following letter from her in reply:

READ THE LETTER OF THANKS FROM SUZA

Lord JesusWe have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Amen.

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