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Proper 16 B

### Pentecost 12 ... (Proper 16 B)

The story was told about a trip Albert Einstein took on the train. The Conductor came by to take up tickets.

"I am sorry," Einstein said, "but I can't find my ticket."

The Conductor said to keep looking and he would come back at which time the famous mathematician still was searching and trying to find his ticket.

"Young man," said Einstein, "I cannot find my stub."

"Don't worry Dr. Einstein, I know who you are and that you bought a ticket," the Conductor kindly stated.

"No, no, you don't understand," said the great teacher.

"I don't need to find the ticket to prove to you I purchased it. I need to find the ticket stub so I can know where I am going."

It is a funny story and true but it is also a parable on our own directions in life and particularly on the 'choices' we make in determining that direction. From the simplest 'Yes, I will go' to the more complex, 'You must tell me more before I can decide' to the important "I will go this way in my life." All 'choices' carry weight and many are made so that one will not have to carry that weight. Some said of the recent General Convention that many delegates 'Went along to go along' meaning that one was not going to say what perhaps needed to be said but would instead just go along thinking that one vote would not matter.

I listened not long ago to Bishop Desmond Tutu telling a story about the apartheid movement in South Africa. He spoke of a worship service in

one of the townships when the movement was in its very heated stage. He climbed into the pulpit of a packed Church to affirm God's being behind the minority and as he began the doors of the Cathedral Church flew open and soldiers marched in, guns at the ready and lined the walls of the Church in a show of marshal law and power. Bishop Tutu's words (if you have not seen Bishop Tutu you must understand that he is a very small man physically and for him to tell this story is just extraordinary) to those soldiers and their leader were: "You may as well lay down your weapons for the victory is ours. It is assured!" He then went on with his message at which time the soldiers marched out of the Cathedral. His choice to speak at a difficult time is what turned the tide of a terrible time.

"Choose this day whom you will serve..." says Joshua to the people who first followed Moses and now are following him into the Promised Land. Covenant theology is the voice of Holy Scripture and it leads us to make life's hard choices in favor of the One who made us all. To respond to God's way is always a 'difficult teaching' and a hard word to swallow because all around us says it is not necessary to respond in such a way. But a 'choice' you must make is "To whom will I listen?"

Today our Gospel concludes the bread of life discourse. Jesus is speaking to disciples who have not made a real commitment of faith to

following him. The apostles had made a strong commitment. Jesus is in Capernaum where His word has confounded many.

Jesus has said that whoever eats this living bread will live forever. Many who were struggling had chosen to hear Jesus' word in a literal way. Some said "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it? (v.60)

But read the Gospels carefully and this misunderstanding or 'no choice' is a standard feature. Jesus takes these opportunities to challenge his hearers in new ways just as did Joshua.

Jesus throws in a word about 'ascension.' Would such a sign change their minds or make their 'choices' easier?

Jesus then turns to 'spiritual' references citing that life in the flesh will not last forever. It just gets more and more difficult seemingly.

But one must listen in life to the words Jesus will provide, words of "spirit and life." (v.63) Jesus promises that the Spirit is forever. These words are not just earthly platitudes and high sounding sayings. These words come from heaven and must be measured against a higher authority. One must hear and decide on a whole other level. Faith is the path of these decisions and it is the Spirit that gives life. Believing leads to seeing.

Jesus knew that some would never believe. But Jesus had made a 'choice' coming out of the wilderness...He had chosen THAT DAY 'whom

he would serve' and it was his Heavenly Father. He knew the path ahead as one of betrayal and denial and doubt. It was the Father's plan that would ultimately carry the day. God's desire for us is greater than our desire for God. [Rhys]

Divine inspiration is built into the fabric of every life. A turn towards God is a response from deep within us. Many close their hearts to God's call thus many followers would abandon Jesus.

Jesus never coerces us. He asks the apostles if they want to leave him as well during these hard times. Peter's response is that Divine within the human heart which says in its depth "*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.*"

You will never truly know Jesus if you run from the hard times. Vernal Dozier, beloved teacher in the Church said: "If Jesus had gone about the countryside only singing songs and praying in front of the crowds as the world says Christians are supposed to do, He would have died in his sleep of old age." NO! God calls us to 'choose life' and that life can only be lived as we are faithful to Jesus in the good times and in the bad times. For Jesus there is only one church and it is made up of what Geoffrey Paul called: "There is no way of belonging to Christ, except by belonging gladly and

irrevocably to the glorious ragbag of saints and fat-heads who make up the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” Geoffrey Paul is a leader in the Church of England and is the father of Rowan Williams’ (the archbishop of Canterbury) wife.

No one has enough money to make a difference for Christ. Jesus is not about this power struggle. Jesus is about ‘choices’ that are truly difficult in life. Are you willing to be ‘poor in spirit’? Are you willing to ‘mourn’ as did Jesus? Are we willing to be ordinary so that someday God will be seen as extraordinary? As Peter says, “*Where will you go*” God’s way takes in ALL of humanity and calls it to be as dedicated to each other as Christ was/is to the Church. God’s plan is to be followed and we are to ‘choose’ it over all other avenues, some of which may look rosier at the moment. There is no rosy path in this life. There is just ‘life’ and God invented it and gave it to us that we might enjoy it forever with Him. Life is not about what you ‘should not do’ but rather it is about ‘what you should do.’

If the Lord is truly your ‘choice’ in life then even as you leave this building today you will be presented with opportunities to serve Him and to ‘choose’ Him. Some of those choices will be easier than others but take heart for He is with you in all of them. He has given you His Church as the place where all choices are to be formed and ultimately sealed. God loves

His Church and we are to live that love in all areas and aspects of life, in all of our choosing. It is what will form and inform who we are and whose we are. “Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Can anyone here do any less? Only He will guide you on the right path today and forever. Amen.