

St. Anne's Parish, Annapolis

August 26, 2018

1 Kings 8: 1, 6, 10-11m 22-30, 41-43 and John 6:56-69

"What Is Essential to You Every Day?"

This is the fourth Sunday Jesus talks about bread in our assigned readings. He talked about it so much because it was present on every table at every meal for every person in his time; it did not distinguish between rich and poor, young and old, Gentile and Jew – everybody ate bread everyday; it was the great essential. Jesus was talking about what is essential to be a person fully alive, right with God and with our neighbors. Today, we need to ask ourselves, is Jesus essential for my life, every day?

Last Sunday, Solomon asked God for the ability to discern between good and evil. "That's what I want and need, Lord; please!" I wonder, would we pray for that?

Our Epistle from Ephesians today is about how a faithful person gets dressed to go into a new week. Listen to the imagery: Put on the armor of God, fasten the belt of truth around your waist, put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, take the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Walk down Main Street to City Dock dressed like that today and you'll get some strange looks. But what might you accomplish this week as a person with a reputation for truth, righteousness, peace, faith and spirit?

What is at stake here is that in this land with all of our freedoms and blessings it is possible to take a life with Christ at the center for granted.

There are no lions being unleashed on us in the coliseums today, and our churches are not being fire-bombed here as they are in Egypt. But that does not mean that following Jesus in Annapolis is easy or automatic.

In fact, when evil is abundantly clear, when the dangers look like lions or weapon-toting mobs, it's easier to see the need for the spiritual combat our Epistle talks about. It is more difficult when things are more nuanced. Choosing this day who and what we will serve is a central question for every single human being, not just for Joshua and his family long ago.

In 1933, Karl Barth, a theologian in Germany, was teaching at the University of Bonn when Adolf Hitler was named chancellor. He wrote that the German political situation was "Like sitting in a car which is driven by a man who is either incompetent or drunk," and urged his students to be all the more committed to live the values of the gospel in the face of the new regime's ideology which had become so popular. He gave a lecture titled, "The First Commandment," the one that says, "You shall have no other gods before me." He said the basis for faith is that "other gods" were all the "other authorities which for some reasons are thought to be important."

Charles Raynal asks what are the false gods of our age, and he cites the love of wealth, determining our behavior based on fear, the trust in power, be it military, political, economic, social or any other. You can name others.

Following Jesus has never been easy. Even in his day, we are told many left him. But as Peter said that day, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Peter saw gratitude and devotion to God as the only thing that ultimately is worth giving your heart to.

In our nuanced, complicated world, discerning and choosing between good and evil is harder than it seems. It's easy to get caught up by the desire for more wealth and things, to give up freedoms in response to fears, to put our hopes in powers other than God. It still takes courage and intentionality to choose Jesus and his ways. What are your family priorities, and what does Jesus have to do with them? How do you spend your time, your money, and what does Jesus have to do with that? That is why gathering as a community of faith is crucial to help us be fed, not on the nourishment of this world, but the alternative of Jesus. The Eucharist we share is a weekly statement of priority, what is life really about. It is our armor in a world that would seduce and captivate us with other things, other cares, other gods. Would that with Joshua we might all say, "As for me and household, we will serve the Lord."