

SERMON, Rev. Dr. Bob Stelter
PROPER 16 B/PENTECOST 14
“Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?”

We’ve heard it said, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” Is that success? Having your dreams come true? Getting all you want?

May I tell you what success is? And I say this without equivocation. Success is the progressive realization of the will of God for your life. That’s what success is, the progressive realization of God’s will for your life.

It’s not how much money you have. It’s not how well-known you are. It’s not how healthy you are. It’s not how many friends you have or how many toys you have acquired. Success is nothing more, nothing less, than the progressive realization of the will of God for your life.

So, what does God require of you? What is God calling you to do? Do you know God’s will? Do you want your heart’s desire to come true?

Do you know who you are following? We Christians are not better people than all the others, but we do follow a better master.

We turn to the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John this morning. This chapter has provided our Gospel reading for the last five Sundays. The chapter begins with great crowds of people following Jesus and, sadly, it concludes with almost all of them leaving him.

This chapter begins with joy and momentum, with so many people following our Lord after the miraculous feeding of more than 5,000 people. They were appreciative, hopeful and amazed. But this chapter reveals the truth about human nature and fulfillment. We read that those same enthusiastic people became offended, decided that Jesus was not for them when he asks some difficult questions. And so, they walked away from him.

Jesus went right to the heart of their motives when he confronted them, saying: “You are seeking me, not because you saw miracles but because you ate the bread and had your fill.”

Many people are interested in religion and church so long as they have their needs met, so long as they are provided for. They love the bread, but they do not love the One who provides the bread. They want the bread, but they do not want the Bread of Life.

Jesus tried to turn their attention to God. He told them, “The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing.” This contrast is at the very center of all that Jesus is about. He tells them quite clearly: “The work of God is this: to believe in the One God has sent.”

It is clear, believing in Jesus means we develop a different focus of attention, develop a change in our list of needs, develop a new definition of the good life.

We like to think we are an advanced society, but we are not much different than those first century people who were following Jesus and eventually turned away from him. We are happy to follow, so long as our bellies are full of bread.

We get one choice. Just one choice. One priority and it must be God.

That is why Jesus is constantly challenging us to put aside any thing that seems more important to us than following him. He calls us to follow him without reservation in every area of our lives.

Jesus told the crowd in today's Gospel reading and he tells us: you have to choose. You must make me your priority. And that is why many of them turned back and no longer followed him.

It would be easy to say, you foolish people. You missed the boat. Jesus was right there in front of you. Why did you turn away from him?

Tell me, please, how are we any different? We don't make him our priority.

Many of those short-sighted people who had seen his miracles and heard his preaching eventually fell away and left him. In fact, it was so many that Jesus even turned to his own disciples and asked them, "You too? Will you leave me, too?"

Their answer, in the words of Peter, is the answer for us. Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Peter says yes, we believe, Lord. We know you are the Holy One of God.

Peter's rock solid faith precedes and supersedes every question of result and reward. Do you believe in Jesus whether he will make you healthy, wealthy and wise, only if you can find some benefit in your immediate future if you follow him?

Will you make a commitment to follow him even if you must leave some of your things behind? Will you submit yourself to others in this body of Christ out of respect for him or must your needs always come first?

Justifying faith is not having a positive opinion about God. It is a commitment to the One who is the eternal definition of faithfulness. It is a relationship with God for the sake of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit alone. It is life in Jesus' name.

Whoever believes in Him will have life, eternal life. Those who lose anything for his sake will find the good that was in it. Indeed, those who lose their lives for His sake will find life. And, conversely, those who hang on to their life will lose it.

It really is an either/or situation. There is no other name by which we live. No one who is his will ever be lost.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."