

Ordinary B-21 / 2018

So here we are at the end of the sixth chapter of John's gospel. This chapter began with a question asked by Jesus: "Where can we buy some bread for the people to eat?" There was no immediate answer to that question, but there was a solution, a miraculous one, that occasioned a comment by Jesus concerning his mission and his identity.

The chapter ends with a question, also asked by Jesus: "Do you want to leave me, too?" Jesus has created a stir because he has said this:

"Just as Abba God has life in me
and I have life because of Abba God,
so those who feed on me
will have life because of me."

There was confusion and bewilderment in the crowd, first among the religious authorities. Jesus is making a connection with God, with divinity - and argues that if we wish to have life, life in abundance and fullness, the life that ancestors had longed for and struggled for, the life that God promised and hoped for, then we will find that life in Jesus.

Some could not tolerate this kind of talk -- and they were not just the curious crowds that hung around after the feeding of the thousands who walked away. Some we are told included many of Jesus' own disciples - they would not remain in the company of Jesus.

Subsequently, comes Jesus' poignant question to the twelve, "Do you want to leave me too?"

Let's face it, many of us, maybe all of us, have at one time or another struggled with our own answer to that question. Reconsidering faith, or perhaps membership, specifically Catholic, is happening today for many, many catholic believers for painful and devastating reasons with which we are all too familiar. And we should not presume that those who leave the church are turning their back on the gospel; perhaps they are doing so in *response* to the gospel.

It's striking that Jesus gives complete freedom to even his own disciples to make the choice. He does not chase after them, does not scold, does not judge. He knew from the start this would happen. And he lays no guilt on them. Perhaps his heart is saddened, but Jesus does not try to possess his disciples. Faith must have the freedom to find itself. Even Jesus cannot give faith. Jesus can only invite it.

Did any of those who wandered away ever return? We don't know. But there

are stories in the gospels of others who came looking, searching, hoping, and found something unexpected in Jesus: mercy, joy, compassion, healing, blessing, purpose, bread, life. We, at certain moments in our own lives, are among these seekers.

We have a custom here, that in inviting visitors and guests to approach the table for communion, we are reminded that we are all on a spiritual journey. There are lots of voices in our religious culture that would like to define that journey for us and even pick our destination and trust that they know the way. But it is uniquely our own journey and it must be. Doesn't **that** seem to be Jesus' wish for us?

And this journey is over the course of an entire lifetime. It takes a long time to become a Christian. In her own experience the poet Maya Angelou understood this. She knew that faith runs hot and cold, there are ups and downs, moments of deep conviction and moments of quiet uncertainty. In an interview she said this: "I'm trying to be a Christian. I'm working at it. I'm amazed when people walk up to me and say 'I'm a Christian.'" I think "Already? Wow!"

So I ask myself in moments of quandary: To whom else will I go? For Simon Peter, that seemed to be the bottom line. But then Peter makes a leap: "We have come to believe and are convinced you, Christ Jesus, are God's Holy One." Note that Peter says "not only I, but **we** have come to believe. For faith happens in the midst of community, with companions with whom we break bread day in and day out.

Beloved, I wish you moments, heartfelt and joyous, when you too share this simple yet profound confession of faith, when you hear that quiet heartfelt voice proclaiming within: "Yes, I have come to believe."