

Being is believing

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

The message today is quite simple. The hardest way of being Christian is being.

I am not going to sugar-coat the pandemic around us or how tired we are of it. I am reading a novel set in the Texas Panhandle during the depression which probably isn't helping my mood. Every night I go to sleep thinking of drought and dust storms and families losing their livelihood.

I feel that watching the lockdowns progress across the State is like watching a dust storm on the horizon; billowing, darkening and coming right at me. Maybe it will pass. Maybe it will miss but that doesn't help the depth of forlorn foreboding. And it doesn't stop the devastation, somewhere.

Cesar Chavez was a farm labour leader in the 70s. He was motivated by his Catholic belief in Social Justice and Gandhi. He helped support pickers (mostly Mexican and South American) exploited by labour-hire companies and land owners. He said,

We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure.

A Christian life is always lived as an alternative to the dominant culture.

That's what gets us through and that's what gets us in trouble.

Our readings today throw up quite a few challenges.

To start with despite this beautiful, aspiring beginning, Solomon actually outdid David in ambition and tyranny. While David fought off the enemies, Solomon turned to oppressing his own people. In fact, his reign was so bad he had to put down several rebellions and the greatest of all, immediately following his death, the tribes of the north withdrew. The unification David had worked so hard on failed because of Solomon.

But he did get to build his temple. And then decreed that all worship must happen there. Previously, people worshiped in their neighbourhoods and the wealthy worshipped "in high places" – that is, spaces reserved on hilltops for sacrifices.

Was the Temple an edifice to God or a monument to Solomon that consolidated his power?

My Jewish relatives would have my guts for saying that but A Christian life is always lived as an alternative to the dominant culture.

Many years later, you will remember from our Gospel readings - When the price of sacrifices became too great for the common people, Jesus turned the tables over.

Just as the Priests were growing in wealthier and wealthier, Jesus says to his disciples, take nothing with you.

I wept when I went into a cathedral in Mexico City and the walls were paved with gold leaf purchased wafer at a time by poor farmers. When did the church go so wrong?

Paul makes a thing of the alternative life by expressing everything in his letter in terms of opposites.

Paul's letter expresses everything in opposites: wise/unwise; understand/ not foolish.

We could easily translate his words to our lives as fast/slow; short term reward/long term vision

But the real opposites lie in the last reading – John 6:51-58, uncomfortable as this reading sounds. There is an awful lot of 'flesh' in it!

On many occasions Jesus speaks about how faith and action are more important than rules and rituals. To love is more important than avoiding certain foods. To help is more important than rules around what you can do and can't do on the sabbath.

In this reading, he takes it all a step further. EAT my flesh, DRINK my blood. These are verbs in the present tense. This asks you to participate; not go off elsewhere and offer a sacrifice sometime. The words are expressed in the here and now. It does not ask you to just believe. If you offer a sacrifice at the Temple – you just have to believe that the priests will do it...and that is enough. Factually, many sacrifices could be found on their dinner tables.

It asks you to *be* present. It asks to participate and most importantly, it asks to ingest. Taking the sacrament draws you into the very life of Jesus. You literally 'abide' – that with/joined. Ingesting the elements binds you physically, historically and spiritually in a unique way to Jesus, the Son of Man. You are enacting the sacrifice and in doing so acknowledging all sacrifices, yours included.

Ingesting makes it part of you and as the Lord's Supper is designed to feed – you are nourished by divine grace. The source is the Living Father who gives life to the Son and you in turn, also receive life.

You can't read a newspaper and receive communion. it is one of the few meals that actually requires you to be present, to pay attention; to be there.

And here we are, in church, about to have communion and waiting for the pandemic to arrive – or not. That awful space of staring at the horizon, frozen in place, watching the cloud. Last week, I talked about the importance of winter; how down there in the dark, things are happening – preparing. And I said that growth often happens in dark places. ...and it is not always painless.

We're in a dark place. We have been for a while and we will be for another while. I'm asking you to treasure this time. To be in it. To savour it, taste it and create memories. I'm asking that we not wish it away as if this has been worthless time – because it's God's time.

We will be mindful and present for this communion. The dominant culture around us is waiting, holding its breath with life is in suspension....but as Christians, we live the alterative to the dominate ethos – we will celebrate life; savour each minute; hunker down and use this time to grow within. We will abide with our aches and pains. We will celebrate growth.

The hardest part of being a Christian is *being*. Being present.

I'd like to finish with my favourite meditation from Psalm 46. I use it *all* the time.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know I am

Be still and know

Be still.

Will you join me and say,

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know I am

Be still and know

Be still.

(SILENCE)

Amen