12th Sunday after Trinity (Year B)

'Make up your mind'

It was the great comedian Tommy Cooper who once said this immortal one liner: "I used to be indecisive but now I am not quite sure." I wonder, how good you are at making decisions? Are the choices that you make wise and considered? Some are better than others. There are those who deliberate long and hard, looking at all the possible options and then choose. There are those who simply trust their own judgement or gut instinct.

Every day we all have to make choices. These can range from the relatively mundane and inconsequential such as "What colour socks will I wear today - red or blue?" To life-or-death decisions, for example a hospital doctor having to decide whether or not to turn off a patient's life support machine.

Throughout our lives we will all be constantly faced with choices and there will inevitably be a consequence for each of the decisions that we make no matter how big or small. Cumulatively over the years, the choices we make effect not only the direction that our lives take but also those of our families, friends, communities, nations and ultimately the wider world.

We see the consequence of these good and bad decisions played out every day in news reports. From the political and military decisions made by governments over the years in Afghanistan to the wider effects of climate change and global warming. It's easy to see that the world is not as it should be. It is breaking because we are broken people constantly making unwise decisions and often the very same ones made by our ancestors.

I would now like to briefly focus on some of today's lectionary readings for the 12th Sunday after Trinity. In our Old Testament lesson Joshua had gathered all the tribes of Israel and their leaders and brought them before God. God then spoke to the people through

Joshua reminding them of the poor decision that their ancestors had made to follow other gods. They now had to make a firm decision to follow the Lord rather than the gods of the land in which they now lived. It was Joshua who took the lead and affirmed: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (24:15). The people remembering the way that God had led redeemed, protected and guided them in the past affirmed that they would likewise all serve the Lord their God. In making that decision they were in effect saying that they would be subservient to God they would put their faith and trust in God's wisdom and guidance mediated through their appointed leaders such as Joshua and not in themselves.

Faith means putting our wholehearted trust in God, even in difficult circumstances that our minds can't fully comprehend. Jesus' teaching was sometimes challenging and difficult to understand. That's why many of his followers fell away (remember the parable of the sower). Likewise, today there are many seemingly intelligent people who have chosen to reject Christ's message.

In our gospel reading from John 6, some of Jesus' disciples found some of his teaching difficult (John 6:60 66,). It may have been the symbolism of eating his body and drinking his blood that they either misunderstood or found offensive. Or it could have been yet another example of the hard demands he made on anyone who wanted to be his disciple. For example, being willing to take up their cross and follow him.

St John wrote that "Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (6:66). It's often hard for leaders when they lose members of their group or organisation but sometimes it is for the best. Why? Because those who remain are the ones who are truly committed. That is exactly what Jesus did in this case. He asked this question of his core group of 12 disciples: "Do you also want to go away?" (6: 67). Just as Joshua had been the spokesperson for the people in our Old Testament reading, so was Simon Peter. He proclaimed: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. [69]We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' "(6.:68-69).

Today the call of Jesus on our lives is still uncompromising, that's partially why many of our churches are not packed to the gunnels. I

know that many of you are struggling with many personal issues in your lives that are perhaps challenging your faith. Perhaps some of you have been tempted like some of those first followers of Jesus to give up and turn away. Can I encourage you not to do so but instead stand firm.

Our reading from Ephesians describes putting on the armour of God. If you are struggling in the midst of life's fiery slings and arrows, do read it again and again. We must continue to remain or abide in Christ and St Paul says: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power". (Ephesians 6:10). Because ultimately, our power and strength comes not from ourselves but from God alone. To him be the glory. Amen.

Rev Andrew Jacobson

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