



### ***The Church's prayer for Sunday 22nd August***

God of constant mercy,  
who sent your Son to save us:  
remind us of your goodness,  
increase your grace within us,  
that our thankfulness may grow,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Bible Readings and Reflection for Sunday 15th August**

#### **A Reading from Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18**

<sup>1</sup>Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup>Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says:

<sup>14</sup>"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

<sup>16</sup>Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! <sup>17</sup> It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we travelled. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

#### **A Reading from Ephesians 6:10-20**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. <sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery



of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

### **A Gospel Reading from John 6:56-69**

<sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." <sup>59</sup> He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

<sup>61</sup> Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! <sup>63</sup> The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> and life. <sup>64</sup> Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. <sup>65</sup> He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

<sup>66</sup> From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

<sup>67</sup> "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

### **A reflection from Revd Charles Fraser, Lead Minister for the Eversdens**

*Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'* (John 6:68 -69)

I think these words are full of pathos. It seems to me that Peter speaks with a kind of fatalism: To whom *else* can we go?

John is writing his gospel some fifty to sixty years after Jesus's death and both Jews and Romans find the church's devotion to sharing in Christ's body and blood very strange at best, and there are accusations of cannibalism at worst. People who may have been attracted by other stories of Jesus are deeply offended: "*This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?*"

But rather than soften the offence, rather than explain things reasonably, and in measured tones as, perhaps, we might imagine Luke doing with his 'orderly account' for Theophilus.



But, no, John seems to maximise the potential for indignation: "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

For Jewish ears this is appalling. To drink human blood *is* to drink life. Blood is reserved only for the altar. To drink it is indeed to have life within oneself, but in the most sacrilegious fashion possible. It is to pretend to be like God. Leviticus 17: 10-14 would be ringing in their ears.

*If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.*

This divine commandment was deeply ingrained in the daily life of the Jews. In fact, this commandment governed what was and wasn't possible for their breakfast, lunch and dinner for every day of their lives. It was such a basic law, and so much a part of the ancient Jewish people, that it's still a cornerstone of modern Jewish eating. An abattoir that produces 'kosher' meat still follows the basic laws of Leviticus 17.

So, when Jesus said that in order to inherit eternal life you must drink his blood, he was using incendiary language that seemed to go against a millennium of biblical teaching. In other words, this teaching was like nails on a chalkboard for an ancient Jew.

Yet, John's gospel is absolutely exclusive at this point. There is no apology: "Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever—" there is a great promise here— but if you do not eat "you have no life in you." Even in the shadow of the Roman Empire, he crosses the sea of Tiberius, at the beginning of the chapter (a city that had not been built in Jesus's time.)

Jesus can turn our perceptions of scarcity and suffering into a plenty which has twelve full baskets left over. He is a fulfilment of all Israel's hopes for the last day. John affirms this with his story of the feeding. Yet John will not let us see him, will not let us eat and drink the communion, without the physical language of flesh being eaten and blood being drunk. We



cannot have manna— the food from heaven— without the reality of flesh being chewed and blood being drunk.

I wonder whether we would understand the words more easily if we were members of John's community? Would the literary style of this gospel be less difficult, less of a mystery, if we were his contemporaries?

I suspect we might even be more unsettled by his words about eating and drinking, as we would not be insulated by time and distance from Jewish sensibilities about the significance of drinking blood. And I suspect we would find the text no less difficult. It seems to expect us to be deserting him. It almost invites us: "Do you also wish to go away?" (6:67) If this were dramatised for stage or screen we might expect the actor to ask the question of verse 67 of *us...* and pause and wait... before answering for Peter.

There is no sympathy for those who are indignant. "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" In other words: if you are offended, you have not begun to see what is going on here!

We can imagine argument and debate between members of John's community and others about the truth of things, and the nature of life. For John's community there is one answer only. "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63) Take it or leave it, there is a way of seeing reality that is real. You either see like this— and no-one [*can see*] me unless drawn by the Father who sent me— or you don't. (John 6:44)

You either have life in you, or you don't. This gospel can be very black and white in the way it portrays things.

To whom else can I go?

To no-one else- There is only one place we are fully alive. It's with people and especially in the act of The Communion. In the Eucharist we are really alive. There is no explaining this. There is only a giving of self to the rite. We have to give ourselves just as we receive what has been given. John would say: You either see and believe this and live life in all its fullness, or you don't.

Amen.