

## **Sermon Series John 6**

### **4: Belief and life - John 6: 56-69**

We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.  
Amen.

This week has been difficult. Here in Australia, the Covid news continues to be bleak. Globally, the world is grappling with the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been a political hot potato for centuries, a pawn in the great game played by global super powers. And the people have suffered and will quite likely continue to suffer in this latest iteration. As we watch bad things happen, both domestically and internationally, perhaps we have felt impotent or powerless, to do anything but complain about the state of affairs.

As I reflected on this last fragment of chapter 6 of John's Gospel, I couldn't get past Peter saying at the end of the reading "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Like Mark and Matthew's Gospels, Peter is the one who declares Jesus' identity, and in both cases, also after the Feeding stories and Jesus walking on water. It's interesting to note that the chapter starts out with 5000 people gathered around Jesus in anticipation of him being the new prophet, and as the we get deeper into John 6 the supporters dwindle to just the 12 faithful disciples, with Peter finally speaking out their belief and knowledge. Chapter 6 becomes a story of belief and unbelief in an uncertain world.

How many of you have struggled with belief and unbelief? Particularly when the world around us, seems so arbitrary, when the actions of those in power seem pointless or unhelpful. How do we retain a sense of belief in

our social systems, in our leaders, and indeed even in our church? What is the anecdote to our unbelief?

Well, I believe that the anecdote is the bread that came down from heaven, the bread of life, the one we know as Jesus. Throughout this chapter Jesus has challenged us to use our imagination, to tap into that God space, as we followed him feeding 5000 people with just five loaves and two fishes, and then as he walked over the water to his disciples in the middle of the lake. Jesus challenged us to think of him as the staple in our lives, as the bread of our life. God calls us to be in relationship with him, in the person called Jesus.

This week I participated in the annual clergy conference and strangely enough it was titled “Reimagining the future in light of COVID”. I hadn’t seen the material before because I missed the roadshow earlier this year through illness. In fact, I don’t even remember them happening! But anyway, I found this idea of reimagining the future intriguing. The material presented was well researched and based on good solid change management principles, the type of material that I myself have used with many organisations in my previous life. And it was intriguing to see this material presented in a community context as it applied to our world today. And I’d like to take some time to describe the model. In short, we were presented with three stages of community development.

The first stage was the COVID crisis, and this applies to last year and the pandemic hitting us. I’m sure we’ll all remember the stress and strain as we learned how to use new technology, as we adapted and stretched our liturgies, and as we also tried to pastorally care for each other when we couldn’t visit, and when numbers were restricted for life events such as

funerals. It was a difficult time, but we came through it. I am sure that there was much prayer, quiet reflection and trust in God, to get us through the crisis stage.

The second stage is where we are at now. We've come out of the crisis, but we're not out of the woods yet. We're still dealing with Covid, but now we have some competency and confidence, in coping with this new environment. And a big shout out to the many teams, who have made this part of our journey bearable – the zoom teams, the leadership teams who have put the processes in place, the prayer warriors, the people who have gone about their ministry behind the scenes, calling others to keep in touch, asking are you OK? And here we are, wondering where to next? Do we go back to the way we were? Or are we being asked to use our imaginations? Is God asking us to take what we've learned over the last 12 months and adapt ourselves to a new way of serving this community? We know one thing hasn't changed. The Diocese is still asking us to go and make the Word of God fully known. And from the Gospel of John perspective, this means to make Jesus known in our community, remember:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

How are we being called to make Jesus known here in Lara and Little River? Perhaps we are coming into the time where we need to consider this because after any crisis when things are turned upside down, the following stage is about transition. How do we transition from where we are today, to our future. And I wonder what that future will be? Will we recover and return to the way we were? Or perhaps we will reinvent ourselves and leap into a

new future. Or perhaps we will reframe and adapt our learnings, and come up with a pathway that mixes both old and new. Whichever pathway we choose to take, we will follow it with spirit and with life, into the future, the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage.

Jesus says “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Jesus is talking about the Spirit giving us a living faith, the indwelling of the Spirit within us, abiding within us, giving us a different way to live life in the world today, and life also in the world to come. I think that these words can give us confidence that there is a path forward. That God calls us forward, inviting us into relationship with him, and challenging us to use our imaginations and make the Word of God fully known in our place, where we are.

Perhaps, we can even echo Peter when he says “You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” Are we people who have come to believe? Are we people who have come to know? If we are, let us be strong in the Lord. And in that strength, let us take as our model, our Jesus. Let us be ready to proclaim the gospel of peace and love and life for everyone who will be called to listen.

Let us pray.

Loving God,

We thank you that you sent your son Jesus to live among us and be as one of us. We thank you that you call us to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. And we pray that as we continue to adjust to this new Covid world, that we will know how to make the Word of God fully known in this place. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.