



August 26, 2018 - A Question of Trust Given by Rev. Mattei

Football is a fast paced, aggressive and tactical sport. Basketball is even faster. But baseball? Baseball can be irritatingly slow. Maybe that is the reason why nearly two thirds of people between the age of 18 to 36 do not watch the game. In fact, the average age of those who watch baseball is 57 compared to 42, the average age of those who watch basketball. It's not surprising that Major League Baseball commissioner, Rob Manfred, is committed to decreasing the length of games (about three hours) and increasing the pace of action. The organization is looking to introduce new rules designed to do just that. But the reply comes swiftly: you sit through a three-hour game to experience the suspense and the great conversations for the educated fans.¹

We are at the end of a series of meditations generated out of the 6th chapter of the gospel of John. The Jews had challenged Jesus in [John 6:31](#) to give them a sign that would allow them to believe in him, maybe just like the ancestors had received manna in the desert. Jesus engages them in a long reflection about trusting him to the point of consuming his flesh in order to enjoy eternal life.

Yes, it's true, God had Israel's back in Egypt and had freed them from slavery. But no sooner is Israel in the desert that the people begin to "grumble" or "complain" against God and Moses. The question seems to be one of trust: Israel does not seem to understand that God will never abandon them and will provide for them every step of the way: gathering manna for the daily consumption only and not more was a sign of their trust in God ([Exodus 16:4](#)).

The Jews and even the disciples do not seem to realize that the same drama is developing in their very life: do they trust that Jesus is the food necessary for life eternal? The Word of God incarnated ([John 1:14](#)) wants to dwell (or rest, abide) in us allowing us to dwell in the Son who dwells in the Father ([John 6:56-57](#)). To partake of Jesus as manna involves a reliance on God. Feeding on Jesus as manna means

¹Susan Jacoby, The View Opener, *Time magazine*, August 6-13, 2018, p. 26

remaining or abiding with Jesus. It is through this proximity that Jesus brings life to those who eat (v. 57).

But “abiding” with Jesus is difficult. Staying with Jesus and learning from him is a long process. For many, a quick fix would be more attractive. The crowd was initially attracted to Jesus when they saw him as a Moses figure, one who could work miracles and possibly provide leadership to overturn and push back at the Roman occupation. As they continue with him, they learn that Jesus is not offering an easy victory but the long road of discipleship. For the disciples Jesus’ teaching is difficult to swallow: “Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.” (Jn 6:66) John specifies that it was *disciples* that abandoned him, not simply the Jews.

The twelve are shown in this passage as the ones who get the point about “abiding” with Jesus. They stick with Jesus even though his teaching is difficult. They recognize and trust Jesus’ words as life giving and do not turn away. They trust that God will provide manna and whatever else they may need for the journey.

The disciples’ reply echoes the acknowledgment and choice of the One, True God that the people of Israel made at Shechem when they entered the promised land ([Joshua 24:1-2.14-18](#)). Just as Joshua did long time ago, Jesus challenges his followers (us included) to choose who it is we worship with our hearts, minds and bodies, with our daily choices and available resources.

Our choice to follow Christ becomes more urgent when confronted with internal and external battles, when we are tempted to yield to internal voices that spur us to actively choose behavioral responses that do not reflect Jesus’ evangelical values. When in a dispute we react in retaliation or are motivated by self-righteousness, contempt, greed or jealousy, we are far from witnessing to the kingdom of God. We miss the image of God in the other and we ourselves have a harder time to access the resources we are given as a child of God. That’s when Paul recommends we get dressed for battle ([Ephesians 6:10-20](#)). Without the armor of faith temptations blind us to the presence of Jesus who wonders if we want to abandon him also: Who is Jesus for us in those moments? How do we come to conclude and confess that Yahweh is the God we worship among the many gods that clamor for our attention? We can borrow Israel’s response: Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods ([Joshua 24:16-18](#))!

Even if Jesus’ words are hard to understand, even if at times it feels hard to reply in a Christian way to a world that seem hostile, we know deep down that to live the gospel is our only hope for sanity and honesty. John explains in so many ways that Christian life

is to “abide” with Jesus. That is what we are after. Yet we also know that we can’t absorb all of the Gospel’s meaning the first time. Our understanding is limited and discipleship takes a lifetime of conversion after conversion. We not always reflect the image of God and the best of us. But where else would we find strength, truth and solace? Peter’s reply to Jesus seems to roll off our very tongue: “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](#)).

Creating God,
help us to seek the values
that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world.
In our desire for what you promise
make us one in mind and heart.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
– Amen.