

21st Sunday OT
John 6:60-69

Shechem was one of the ancient holy places of Palestine. Situated between two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, it is close to Samaria, the place ***where Jesus met the woman at the well***. Joshua reports the old tradition that once the conquest of the Land was complete, the whole of Israel, even those like the family of Rahab who had not shared the desert experience, and other inhabitants of the land, assembled at the shrine and committed themselves to the God who had brought the tribes out of Egypt. At Shechem, Israel rejected the many gods of their ancestors and the gods of the nations around and became a single people committed to one God.

As one studies the Hebrew Scriptures, the Book of Joshua seemed like the dream of a united Israel and the Book of Judges started to look more like the reality. Instead of a country well united, it was really a country still fighting each other tribe by tribe, and occasionally uniting only when outside forces seem ready to overwhelm them.

In the synoptic gospels of Mathew, Mark, and Luke, Peter had spoken up for the other disciples at Caesarea Philippi in confessing Jesus as the Messiah. In John gospel, Peter had already come to this belief at the Jordan River at the beginning on the word of his brother Andrew. The confession that Peter makes at this point is one of a series in this Gospel of John. The ***Samaritans*** recognized him as Savior of the world. The ***man born blind*** believed in the Son of Man. ***Martha*** called Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. ***Peter*** recognized Jesus as the one who has the words of eternal life: he is the great revealer, the Holy One of God. ***John wants his readers to make these confessions their own***.

There were departures from the community for which John wrote. It is probably to these that ***we owe the emphasis in the narrative on lack of belief*** and the later mention of Judas. Some of these apostasies were likely to have come about because of a failure to accept the high doctrine of the Eucharist insisted on by the community. They believed that in the Eucharist they ***really*** saw Jesus, that when they took part in it, they ***really*** fed on his body and blood. It was Jesus who brought them the living water that was a symbol of both his teaching and the Spirit. Jesus himself was the true bread on which they had to feed in order to come to eternal life with the Father.

Ironically, Shechem and Shiloh were destroyed, cities at that time *symbolic* of the tribes united under Yahweh without a temple but a simple portable shrine called the ***Ark of the Covenant***. Eventually the Ark would be replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem, David's capitol of the United Kingdom, until the tribes became divided again at King David's death and formed their own kingdoms, only to be destroyed one after the other by other superpowers. Of course, their belief was that the Temple would never be destroyed, even if they did not remain faithful to their covenant with Yahweh.

Jesus gives us a hint to the Samaritan Woman about how we should worship, and it was neither Temple nor Basilica, neither Synagogue nor Church. "The hour is coming, woman, when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...(but) will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed, the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."

The Ark of the Covenant was a portable tabernacle which the Jews brought with them throughout their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Jesus reminds us that we are that ***portable tabernacle***, but tabernacles of flesh. "And the Father and I will come and make our dwelling in him." Hopefully we are no longer wandering but united in the Eucharist.

This is where we get into deep theology. If we are the Body of Christ, then what we receive at the Eucharist is Christ and ourselves. Hopefully we become what we receive, what we eat, at the Eucharist – the Body of Christ. One reason the Eucharist is so powerful a witness to Praise and Worship, is that we have to unite as one Body of Christ to celebrate and with Christ as our Head we give fitting praise.

So, when Christ asks us, "Will you too leave me?" he is really asking, will you also give up on the Body of Christ, the Church, the Eucharist with all its faults and blemishes? That is why, when we become divided over how the Eucharist is said, with the particular rituals and even the language, I am sure it all becomes silly to Christ. It is not the outside of the body that is important but the inside, which is Christ. It doesn't matter whether the Body of Christ clothes itself with the Orthodox ritual, or the Vatican II ritual, or the Ukrainian, Romanian, Greek and even Latin ritual. We are all the Body of Christ which we receive each time we celebrate

the Eucharist. Even though some like to force everyone into the same dress code, that is not why we are here today and at every Eucharistic Celebration. We are simply here to unite as one body in Christ, to hear the Word of God read and to break open bread to receive his body and blood as the sign of perfect worship and praise to God the Father in communion with the Holy Spirit with Christ as the ultimate Presider at this Eucharist and every Eucharist.

“Will you too leave me?”

“Where will we go? You have the words of Eternal Life!”