

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*August 22, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on John 6:57-69** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, can be divided into two sections dealing with Jesus' teaching in Galilee and the journey to the cross in Jerusalem. The pivotal point in the story is Peter's confession and the transfiguration of Jesus. The Gospel of John, however, is always journeying to the cross. There is no account of the transfiguration in John and Peter's confession is not the answer to "Who do people say that I am?" but rather "Do you also wish to go away?" Given the graphic ending of Jesus' sermon on the Bread of Heaven, this is no a surprising question. Other followers had already left and now it was down to those whom Jesus had called. Peter's confession is less about revealing Jesus' identity ("you are the Messiah") and more about the depth of belief that Peter and the other disciples have reached ("to whom can we go?"). Peter is stating what John has told the reader from the beginning - Jesus is the very Word of God. Understanding the full extent of what that means will not occur until after the resurrection.

John 6:68 "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Where do you go for advice and guidance?

What or who has authority in your life?

If the Gospel contradicts tradition or popular opinion, which has authority?

Do we try to "water down" Jesus to fit our opinions?

Or do we militarize Jesus when we want vengeance or justice?

Are they "the words of eternal life" if we only follow the ones we like?

## **Commentary on 1 Kings 8:2-40** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The setting for the dedication of Solomon's temple is easily overlooked but provides important insight into Solomon's prayer. During the seventh month (September-October), three major Jewish festivals occur: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot (Leviticus 23:24-42). The month begins with the blowing of the trumpets symbolic of gathering the workers to bring in the fall harvest. The Feast of Trumpets today is celebrated as Israel's New Year. Ten days later, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is observed. The time between Trumpets and Atonement, sometimes called the "Days of Awe", is a time of spiritual preparation similar to Holy Week. On the Day of Atonement, heaven is opened and names are written in the Book of Life and Death. A sacrifice is made on behalf of the entire people appealing to God's mercy and forgiveness. This could be the context for the moving of the ark with sacrifices lasting over many days and Solomon's prayer which emphasizes God's forgiveness to those who are contrite. On the fifteenth day of the month, the people gather in tents for a week long celebration called the Festival of Booths (Sukkot). Many scholars believe this is the celebration of Solomon mentioned after the dedication. The focus of moving the ark from a "tent" to a "house" takes on a deeper meaning in this context. The connection between the Temple and these festivals can found throughout the New Testament when Jesus calls his body the "new temple". The image of the harvest, atonement, and God dwelling with and in God's people are strong themes in both the Gospels and the Epistles.

1 Kings 8:39 "hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know-- according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart"

Where do you go in order to be heard by God?

Is God only in a church or temple?

Can God be found in nature or in a private prayer garden?

What if the dwelling place is not actually a place but a person?  
Is it simply enough to have the Holy Spirit or do we also need the Body of Christ?  
If Jesus is the Temple, then where do we go to be with Jesus?

**Commentary on Ephesians 6:10-20** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

When Paul speaks of being strong in the Lord, he is doing it from prison ("ambassador in chains"). Paul is not just giving good advice but is speaking from personal experience. Why do we need to be strong? Because of the spiritual forces which assail us. Paul makes it clear that it is not "flesh and blood" enemies for we are to love them for even they are part of God's creation but rather "the wiles of the devil, the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Rulers and authorities should not be seen as referring to individuals but rather corrupting positions and roles created in a fallen human society. Note that the armor of God accept for the Word is all defensive: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes for proclamation, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. Paul then demonstrates how to use "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" in prayer "at all times in every prayer and supplication". The sword is not meant to cause harm but to free others from their captivity. It is God who wins the battle. We simply steadfastly hold the light of Christ against the darkness so others may know of our hope in Christ.

Ephesians 6:18 "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication."

What if our true armor is the Spirit?

Are truth, righteousness, proclamation, and faith fruits of the Spirit?

What about salvation, peace, and the understanding of God's word?

What if "putting on the armor" means being sealed with the Spirit?

Can we be sealed any other way than prayer?

Does daily prayer help us face the spiritual powers of this world?

**Sermon "Who do you turn to?"** ([Sermon Video](#))

When Solomon dedicated the first Temple around Yom Kippur, he prayed that when people turned toward the Temple in humility that God would be merciful and hear their prayer. For centuries later, the Jewish people would turn toward the Temple and pray for God's help and blessing. Not long after Jesus' death, however, the Temple was destroyed and has yet to be rebuilt. Without an ark or a place to make the atoning sacrifice on Yom Kippur, the question for rabbis is will the prayers of the people be heard. This is at the heart of the need for a Jewish homeland after World War II.

As Christians we know that our atoning sacrifice does not need a Temple and does not need to occur once a year. Jesus, who died on the cross, made the perfect sacrifice once and for all time. Jesus is our Temple in which the Word of God dwells. Jesus said that if the Temple was destroyed, God would raise it after three days referring to his own resurrection. All the hopes contained in Solomon's prayer have been met in Jesus. For the original disciples who had not only witnessed Jesus' public miracles but also all the he did in private, they came to know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. When others found Jesus' teaching too difficult, Peter responded "Where else can we go? Only you have the words of eternal life!"

It is easy to turn to Jesus when our world is falling apart for only He has the strength we need. When we are broken and our lives are broken, we find comfort and healing in Jesus. On those holy days, we gather with Jesus to give thanksgiving for all that God does in our lives. In all of these, turning to Jesus is easy and at times essential. But there are those times when the world calls us to turn away from Jesus and focus on the "real world". Jobs, family, and community all want us to turn our attention towards them and make them our first priority. There are times when the teachings of Jesus match our world but at other times Jesus' teaching challenges the hate and bigotry embedded in our

world and so effectively used by politics to rally their base. It is during these times that we too may be tempted to “take a break” from Jesus. Jesus asks us during these times, “Will you too leave?” If we do leave, we often find that only Jesus has the words of eternal life.

If we respond, like Peter, that we will not leave but follow, we do not go alone. Jesus has clothed us in the Holy Spirit. Like a suit of armor, the Holy Spirit protects us in the midst of the trials of life. All of the attacks of the world will fail compared to the strength of God in the Spirit. The gifts and the fruits of the Spirit (faith, peace, truth, and righteousness) provides an armor in our dark world. We have the assurance of salvation and the promises of God not from a Temple but from the living Word of Jesus who both died and lives for us.