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Josh 24:1-2, 14-18
Eph 6:10-20
John 6:56-69

I have always said that I was born 30 years too late. And one reason is because I just love movies from the 1930's and 40's. One of my all time favorite things to do when I was young was to stay up all night watching old "who dunnit" movies. For those of you who do not know what that word means it means, a murder mystery story. I used to love to watch Sherlock Holmes, The Maltese Falcon, the Thin Man series and anything Alfred Hitchcock made. Back then my mom subscribed to the Alfred Hitchcock book club. Every month a book that looked like the readers digest would come and it had about 4 mystery stories in it. She had stacks and stacks of them in the house. If you think about it, the majority of movies and books and especially T.V. shows now are all about solving crimes, they are all about the process of how we figure things out, solving a mystery and about how we come to know for certain what has happened and who did what.

We are on the 4th Sunday of hearing Jesus try to explain how eating bread and wine is like consuming his flesh and blood.

Remember the disciples were having a hard time figuring that one out because they were like us. They did not like a mystery when it came to understanding Jesus. When it comes to your faith and to Emmanuel's finding a new Rector, -I know you don't like a mystery! I have been in transition ministry for 18 years. I have served very large and very small congregations as an Interim Rector and I also am a search consultant. After all this experience I think I am safe in saying that you, Emmanuel, have some degree of certainty in this transition process in order to feel comfortable.

And today we hear that likewise some disciples left Jesus over the uncertainty that he was preaching. He was not guaranteeing anything or anyone that he would be around for a long time.

And if you remember Jesus was healing all manner of ills and people and even instructed his apostles to tell NO ONE about what he was doing. In fact, theologians call this command “The Messianic Secret” . This mysterious way of talking scared them. And I think we can relate to the disciples having to have certainty about how Jesus’ flesh and blood is the bread and wine we eat together. And how our believing in things unseen can strengthen and guide a faith community.

I also think we sometimes forget that the foundation of our faith as Episcopalians is something we can not explain- how and why God offers us grace through Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension is something we can not fully understand, it’s a mystery because we can not contain God into the small space of our brains.

In fact we even call our reason for being“The Paschal Mystery” and we say that fact every Sunday.

When I say during the Eucharistic prayer “Therefore we proclaim the Mystery of faith” you say...“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”-- The Paschal Mystery! And that’s not the only place we acknowledge that we don’t fully understand God’s work. In our post-communion prayers in Rite 1 and 2 we thank God “for feeding us in these holy Mysteries” of bread and wine and that we are living members of the “mystical” Body of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. All pretty tough statements to get our minds around. Yet, mystery is the foundation of our faith.

I am wondering today what would make us different than the disciples? We already know we can’t completely figure out the greatness of God and the salvation of Jesus. But what would it take to make that choice, to not shrug our shoulders and leave because we can’t figure everything out right now during this time of transition and unknowing at Emmanuel,

to not turn our backs, to not walk away when asked to “make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel” as Paul states.

Jesus in his wisdom and love gives us the answer about what it takes. He said throughout his earthly life we have to use the objects and elements of our individual and corporate lives, things exactly like our offering of bread and wine to help you proclaim the Good News of God’s love.

It is not a mystery to me what can happen during an intentional interim period for a congregation. I know that now you all may see through the glass darkly. But I have seen congregations become stronger, deeper and healthier because of their willingness to step into mystery with faith. God is in the midst of our work together and not just in our worship time on Sundays. Jesus will be present every moment.

Think about it. Seeds, plants, trees, sheep, gates, vines, cleaning, fishing, sharing a meal, engaging in spiritual conversations and yes, a lot of navel gazing on Emmanuel's behalf— through all these things Jesus can proclaim the paschal mystery to us, and our surrounding community.

You know one time I was having a conversation like this with someone and they said "You are the "expert with the collar", you are the professional Christian, I'll let you proclaim the Gospel". I say, You don't need a collar. You can use your casual clothes or your business suits. You can wear your crocs, your wingtips, your sneakers, your work boots, your high heels, when relating what the paschal mystery means to you and to Emmanuel, this transition process is about making it your authentic faith, the faith that only you can reveal not mysteriously, but openly, boldly, and proclaim to this broken world. Amen.