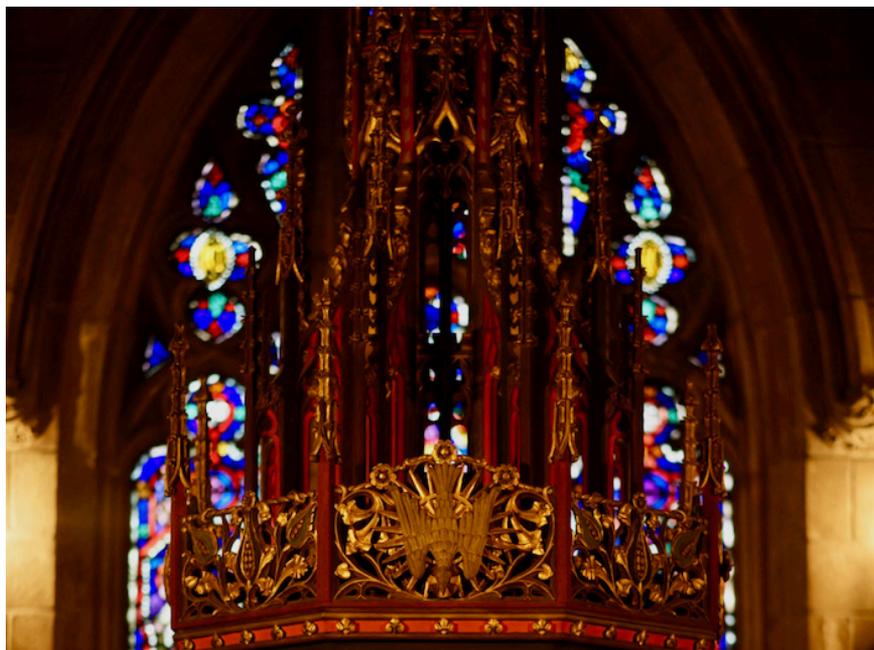


# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## STAYING CLOSE TO THE WORDS OF LIFE

**The Rev. Andrew F. Kline**

Text of a Sermon preached the 13th Sunday after Pentecost

August 22, 2021

JOSHUA 24:1-2A, 14-18 | PSALM 34:15-22

EFESIANS 6:10-20 | JOHN 6:56-69

Today, we are reminded that it was not easy for Jesus to be understood. For instance, when he told his disciples that he would have to suffer and die. For instance, when he talked about the absolute necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, yet, wait, in the next breath says, none of it matters unless you know that it is the Spirit, not the flesh, that gives life. He can be hard to understand. He can be harder to follow. We have heard him ask us, haven't we, "do you too wish to go away?"

It is an old story. The struggle between faith and doubt. Love and despair. We also have heard Joshua say to the people of Israel on the frontier of the Promised Land, “choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Will you put away your idols and your disobedience and keep the commandments of the Lord? The great irony of the biblical story is that in the very next verse Joshua tells them. Sorry. You just can't do it. You may say you want to serve the Lord, but you are not, by yourselves at all capable. You will see.

Thus, at the right time, at the moment when Cesar in Rome pretended to be God, and it looked like God's people had lost the promise of their life and liberty, God sent his Son, to live and die for us. To give us the words of life. To show us another way. Today, as we celebrate yet another baptism, another child to be born again into God's family, we shall remember that the Spirit gives life.

The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. And the very first words he spoke to his disciples, behind those locked doors in the Upper Room, were “Peace. My peace I give to you. My peace I leave with you. Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” With this one word - Shalom - he made us all his agents of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of new life.

Today, in the rain. I looked up. And there was a red cardinal. So bright, so rich, so beautiful. Singing a one note song. Calling out to me. Calling me.

Today we must not forget that we are only here because the Father raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Spirit, declaring him the eternal Son, returning to where he came from, taking death captive and bringing gifts to all humankind. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, we are all wasting our time here this morning. We are like Joshua lining up the people and exhorting them to follow, yet knowing that they will not, that they are incapable of putting away their idols and their sin. Yet Joshua does it, because he is faithful to the story. And he knows he has to let God do the rest.

Today, you and I awoke to strange news all around us. A world burning up with the fire of climate change. Chaos, disappointment, anger, argument about a lost battle in Afghanistan. What was fought

for? What did we win? What did we lose? Did we lose the war, or just a battle. Does that even matter when we are talking about saving lives of those who want to live in dignity and freedom, to live more closely to the image of God within them.

Today, you and I do not have to have all the answers to those questions. But we would do well to remember Paul's words, as he took his faith in God, Father, Son and Spirit, and imagined for us how we could face this confusing world. He said, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power."

"Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

He looked over at the Roman soldier, outfitted for violence, war, and repression, and imagined the opposite, imagined the equipment we needed to be able to stand for our mission of peace. You will notice, among the many symbols that give us a sense of the character we need, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the shield of faith, he gives no name to the most important part. Notice. He says. Find whatever you need to put on your feet so that you can use all these other things to proclaim the Gospel of peace. "As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace."

It's all that matters. As Jesus first words to us were "Shalom. Peace." So our first and last words today, to each other, is "Peace. Shalom."

As Peter so powerfully said: "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."

Stay right here. As close as you can. And then you will see what you need to see, a sign, a sound in the sky, a red cardinal letting you know that there is more to be seen. There is more work to do. More faith, hope and love to show. Listen. For He has the Words of life.

