

The Gospel today tells us one thing: that if we want to be helped by Jesus, we must put aside all other helps. This is what it means to cross the water as the disciples do - and as Jesus, miraculously, does. When they all arrive on the other side there is a certain amount of chaos: the disciples who were in the boat saw a divine sign in his walking on the ocean: the unbelieving crowd saw nothing. They follow in a ponderous, sluggish, ferryboat fashion, and are amazed to find Jesus home before them, when they had last seen him tearing up into the mountains in the opposite direction.

Jesus is not very complimentary to these seekers after enlightenment, and uses a rude word about their response to free bread. "They all had plenty to eat was John's prim way of putting it; Jesus says they got stuffed. Then he says something very deep.

Do not work for food that cannot last;
work for food that endures to eternal life.

Adam was told he would have to work for food: but what food will be worthy of his labour? Jesus' choice of the word *food* instead of *bread* is significant. He is not asking us to think about different kinds of foodstuffs, but of everything we look to for sustenance; all that we work for, all that we wake for and get up for. The word *endure* or *remain* is one of John's favourites; Jesus remains with us, and remains in the Father; the Father and Son will come to us and remain with us, a Christian remains part of the vine and endures for all eternity. It's the word that describes everything that comes to resemble God in his eternal remaining. Work for that kind of sustenance; this is what the Father offers you by sending you his Son.

Often we choose what's transient quite deliberately. The emotion raised by a flower is more than half about its transience, and if we approach a delicate and beautiful bloom and discover it is silk or plastic, we recoil in disappointment. The transience of human beings attracts us in just the same way; there is a lovely perfection about some people which we know is going to waste away, and which we want to capture, as if we could make it eternal by loving it. This becomes a matter of faith: how do we live with the fact that beauty fades, that humanity itself is passing, the feeling that nothing remains? Some pursue a desperate path of rapacious greed, trying to possess and be possessed by the raised dust that is human flesh. They are always in flight from the messages which speak of death, that unmentionable and certain fact.

But Jesus speaks of a food for eternity, and identifies himself with it. The food of eternity is to be had by those who will believe in the one whom God has sent. That is what this chapter is about. Jesus will ask them to decide: *Do you believe that I have come from God?* This is the great and final question that decides the fate of each one of us forever. If we decide to say no, we cannot come with Jesus; and at the end of this chapter some decide they cannot listen to this claim. We know it is the central question; and it will be the question of Pilate at his trial: *Where do you come from?* If we decide he is from God, then the heavens are opened to us, and we must move out of the shelters and snares of our transient life, and begin to live in the light of eternity.

*This is working the deeds of God:
we must believe in the one he has sent.*