

Gospel: John 6:56-69

The "hard saying" that offends Jesus' disciples is his claim that his followers must eat his flesh and drink his blood. The followers who return to their old lives know something about how odd this sounds. Simon Peter, on the other hand, knows something about the scarcity of living, gracious words. He asks the most important question: "To whom shall we go?"

[Jesus said,] ⁵⁶"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In our 24Tuesday services this summer our theme has been: Questions Jesus asked. In this series, we have been looking at the questions posed by Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament Gospels. First off, one may wonder how many questions did Jesus ask in the Bible? The answer may surprise you. Again, the exact number varies depending on some wording and sentence separation in the original Greek language is translated, but did you know that Jesus is recorded to have asked over 300 questions? Also, what may surprise you is that he only answered around 3 of them. At each gathering of the 24Tuesday service we explore, one sometimes two or three of these questions, depending if they are grouped together in a certain passage. This morning's passage represents a group of such questions. In our Gospel text from John this morning we are wrapping up this several Sundays of the theme Jesus as the bread of life. Today's passage concludes this theme, with the very hard results of Jesus's word's, namely that some of the followers leave. The passage actually contains three different questions that Jesus asked those around him. They are: Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? And thirdly: Do you also wish to go away?

Sometimes it is very easy to realize how hard hitting and controversial some of the statements, teachings, and words of Jesus were for those people who first heard them. For us to day who take communion weekly, the bread and wine, being the body and blood of Christ, hardly even raises our eyebrows. However, the fact that Jesus is telling the followers that they will eat his flesh is not an easy thing to hear, not an easy thing to comprehend, not an easy thing to digest, pun intended.

Remember all this break all gets started when Jesus does the feeding of the five thousand. Up to that point his popularity as a teacher has been building momentum day by day. It is for this reason so many come to hear him that speak, but when, on that day, the entire crowd is fed by him, that the amount of people following him skyrockets. Since that sign, crowds are flocking to him, people are lining up to hear him, and it is with this metaphor concerning the bread that Jesus takes disciples and learning to the next level. The problem however, is that among the people there, there are many who are present simply because they are waiting for the bread and fish to make an appearance again. Many have now come to follow Christ with certain expectations of what is going to happen and perhaps more importantly what is going to happen to them. Today's passage takes Jesus' words to another level; a level that proves too difficult and challenging for some.

When he is finished with this teaching, when his talk of bread no longer means guaranteed food for one's stomach, when his talk of bread becomes that of eating his body, as the bread of heaven; this talk is enough, or too much for some. For some, the understanding of it simply bypasses them and these followers choose to walk away. It is not often in the scriptures that we hear people walking away to leave him when Jesus is done speaking, but this is the case today.

The reality is that then, Jesus's actions, signs, and teachings often were so challenging to people that they found it difficult to buy into everything he was saying. This was not only true for even his followers, it was certainly true for the religious authorities who want to kill him for all of these things. The reality perhaps, is that today in the summer of 2018, it is still too hard for many to hear the truths of the Gospel because sometimes

the truth of the Gospels remain very difficult to swallow. I am not referring to how sometimes in our modern world we have misused or misinterpreted things that Jesus did and said; how sometimes we have strayed from the message of the Bible and Jesus. I am talking about the actual life and message of Jesus Christ that we call the Gospel. Sometimes we have to be honest and admit that we can often soften the often hard-hitting words and teachings that come right from the very mouth of Jesus. These include instructions such as this: “Forgive not seven times but seventy times seven,” or “Anyone of you who does not give up all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” Or “Turn the other cheek,” Or “Bless those who curse you,” Or “ If anyone wants to sue you for your coat, give your cloak as well,” OR “Whoever has two coats must share with one who has one, and whoever has food must do likewise.” Or how about this one: ““Love your enemies.” I have a bumper sticker in my office that reads: “When Jesus said love your enemies, I think he probably meant, don’t kill them.” Talk about tough.

We cannot forget that these teachings from Jesus, recording as coming right from his own lips, are not just religious. They are moral, they are instructive, they are political, they are demanding. Jesus is not making mere suggestions here. It is so easy, and so human to figure out ways to lessen the power of these statements.

Sometimes in our journey, sometimes in our relationship with God; we want to skip over the challenging parts. Sometimes in our faith we just want the baskets of bread; and when our experience is not that, like some of the disciples in today’s Gospel, the simple solution is to turn back and go another way. As this gospel story unfolds, the people, who were disciples, are abandoning Jesus, so he asks the twelve disciples if they too wished to

go away from him. Peter, being the spokesperson for the other disciples then responds with this confession, which we sometimes sing in our liturgy before the reading of the Gospel: "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."

One wonders, how could Peter and the other eleven remain with Jesus and make this confession, while, on the other hand many others, who were also his disciples, abandoned him? The main reason seems to be that the ones who left placed their own understanding; their own knowing; over and above faith; of being willing to trust in Jesus even if they did not completely understand his teachings. But for Peter and his companions, faith took precedent over knowledge and understanding. Faith took precedence over the great challenge of his words. They didn't understand it all, and neither do we. We do not know and understand in order to have faith and believe.

At times we face many tests and hardships in life. At times we are challenged. If we are not challenged sometimes by the words of Jesus I think we must have stopped listening. At times we might be tempted to turn away from Jesus and go looking for "greener pastures." However, our God does not reject us or punish us for all of this. Instead, God hears us through Jesus and he invites us back again and again. "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Amen.