

The Fourteenth Sunday of Pentecost

August 30, 2015

**Prayer of the Day:** Almighty and everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and love; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Jesus Christ has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Alleluia! (2 Timothy 1:10).

**Sermon Text:** John 6:60-69

Our sermon is based on John 6:60-69:

**60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"**

**61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? 62**

**What if you see the Son of Man**

**ascend to where he was before! 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."**

**66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**

**67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.**

**68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."**

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Do these words not just jump out at you? I mean, here you see at least three different groups of people, all standing around Jesus. You see the Twelve disciples. The

crowds themselves contain thousands of non-believing bystanders. There are others who are Jesus' disciples, people who believe and follow him.

Yet, the reaction is so unexpected, something that we might not see coming. Jesus speaks and the crowds leave. Why? What gets in the way of them following the Savior?

Remember everything we have talked about over these past four weeks? Yes, we have gone through John 6 for a while now, but remember, Jesus has not been meeting them on Sunday mornings, giving a 5-week sermon series on "The Bread of Life." Instead, this long conversation with the crowds has been going on for only a few hours.

In the course of those few hours Jesus has done and said so many things. He fed them with so little food—tearing loaves and fish apart, handing out generous portions without any worry that he might possibly run out, only stopping when the crowds are full (and not because he ran out of food). He cures crippling diseases, heals blood infections, strengthens lame legs, opens eyes, ears, and mouths so that they can function. Then he speaks with authority, not making up new teachings that originate from his mind, but rather pointing all of us to what God's Word means for our life.

What was the reason he does all of this? What is he revealing about himself? Everything Jesus does, everything Jesus says centers their minds on the undeniable truth that Jesus is divine. If he is divine, then he must be the Holy One God, sent to be the only Way to heaven.

Quite frankly, you see Jesus doing what so many want him to do today. You hear: "If God is real, then why does he not come down from heaven, do some great miraculous sign, and then prove to all of us that he is truly God? We would believe in him if we saw him do that." How many of you have heard something along those lines? The request sounds somewhat reasonable—until you read here, in John 6, and see that Jesus did come down from heaven. That he did do miraculous signs. That all these things prove that he is someone divine; that this Jesus must be the One promised to save the world from sin.

And people today say the same thing those crowds long ago said: **"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"** I mean, did you know that one out of every three Americans say they have no church affiliation? It means that one out of every three Americans cannot point out one place where they worship regularly. Yet, of those 33% who say they have no home church, 67% of them still say they are spiritual; they somehow have a relationship with God—all without reading or hearing the Bible! How can that be when Jesus says: **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.**

I mean, what makes Jesus' teaching "hard to accept"? He is not using big vocabulary words or long, drawn-out sentences. In fact, the point of his teaching is pretty crystal-clear: *"I tell you the truth, whoever believes has everlasting life"* (John 6:47). How is that "hard to accept?" Their difficulty with his teachings have very little to do with his plain words; it has everything to do with the heart—and with what people want to hear.

You see, wherever Jesus' teachings are taught, there the devil stands right next to it. When Jesus says: *"I tell you the truth, whoever believes has everlasting life"* (John 6:47), that

is a clear teaching— that is, until the devil comes and asks: “What do *you* think about that? What do *you* believe? What do *you* feel is right? “If God is so loving, would he really send everyone who rejects him to hell? What kind of loving God does that? Do you think he would do that?” “Don’t you feel that God does not care how you use your bodies, as long as you love people and do not hurt others?” “What do you believe about God’s Word? Do you want to listen to all of it? You could probably pick and choose which teachings you want to believe.”

The devil stops roaring at nothing to get us to do the exact same thing he did so long ago: to have us to march up to God and tell him that we will follow our own thoughts (— and not follow his Word). What foolishness! Look at how it turned out for him! He is damned to hell! Cast out of heaven, him and all of his followers and all those that do the same thing— even those who think they can tell God whose word they will follow.

You know, the hardest part about Jesus’ teaching is not that Jesus is God’s divine Son. The miracles and authoritative words prove that Jesus is someone different. The far harder teaching to wrap the mind around is “why.” Why would Jesus come down from heaven, descend to earth for us? Why would he do it to pay for sins that he had no part in doing? Because he loves us— and he gave us his Word.

That is what the apostle John tells us in the very beginning of this gospel book. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). Jesus is that Word. He is called the living Word (or the Word made flesh) because he tells us how he opens heaven. He speaks; his disciples record his Words for us. We read those words and we hear what Jesus says to us.

In that Word, we hear Jesus hold to *everything* his heavenly Father wants him to say and do. He continues revealing to all people that he alone is the Way to eternal life ([John 14:6](#)). Yet, the crowds leave. Now would be the time for Jesus to change the message! He could get them back! He could simply make bread, be their king, and rule them and he would be popular and have so many people like him! Now is the time to apologize for his “offensive” words!

Yet, Jesus does not change a thing. Why? Because **These words are spirit and they are life**. What does that mean? It means that Jesus has God’s perfect words contained in his perfect life. It means that Jesus perfectly obeys and willingly listens to everything his Father says— and does this for our benefit. That perfect life of obedience was handed over to death; he dies our death! Because he makes this great exchange, the Father sees his perfect Word contained in your perfect life—you being made perfect in God’s sight because of Jesus’ payment for you!

The Holy Spirit has created faith in your heart. Now you hear these words and you trust them. Jesus says that he is the Way to eternal life and you believe that; you know this is true. Believing these words give you eternal life.

Where do you hear these words? That is what Jesus asks. **“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve**. The disciples knew exactly what religious

teachings are out there. They could follow their own thoughts and try to live a good and happy life. They could listen to a self-appointed leader spew out untested, untrue facts about God's Word. They could return to laws in Pharisee-run synagogues, trying to obey all sorts of rules to be a better person on earth and gain a hope of heaven.

Where else would the disciples hear such teachings anchor their hearts and minds on the certain reality of heaven? No other speech or sermon or message or teaching could replace what Jesus offers them. Through faith they know that only Jesus' words guarantee eternal life.

Notice also, just because the number of disciples dwindle, they do not leave Jesus. The Twelve do not worry about being part of a socially popular crowd; they do not look to join a new group of followers simply because that group is big. They recognize that Jesus is too valuable to let go. They knew the success of his Word does not depend on the size of the crowd, but rather on the content of the message.

The content of the message is clear. **Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** Only the Holy One has struck down our devilish foe— and not us by our personal actions. Only the Holy One has met God's perfect demands— and not us by making some personal choices. Only the words of the Holy One gives eternal life— and not us following our personal thoughts of what we think is fair or right or true.

Peter's confession gives us a splendid viewpoint of what we consider important here. We live in a world that still searches for someone's words to trust, whose words silence the hole left from heartaching tragedies. We live in a world which wants to know who makes life well. As one Bible student put it so well: "My heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." May our answer echo that thought. May we reflect on our connection to Jesus and say: "Here we gather around the Bible and we get to hear Jesus speak through the Bible. He has the words of eternal life. He alone tells us how we go to heaven."

Yes, our friends may look at us weird. People may want to find something else in a church. Remember, crowds looked at Jesus weird too. Crowds wanted to find something else other than Jesus. They wanted bread, healing, a leader. What does he do? He continues preaching and teaching the only Word that matters, the only Word that gives your spirit life. He continues standing as our Victor over the world's greatest foe. My fellow believers, **TO WHOM SHALL YOU GO?**