

Sermon - August 25, 2024

We continue, and I think this may be our last week hearing the “Bread of Life” discourse. You remember Jesus fed the 5,000; they wanted to make him their king. They came seeking him because they wanted to be fed in their bellies, and he keeps trying to tell them it's not about physical food; and he has now claimed being the Bread of Life, and talked about eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Anybody from the outside looking in and hearing this may think that Jesus is encouraging his disciples to become cannibals. That is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus often used metaphors and similes and different figures of speech to try to help make the point. It's a technique that is still used by teachers in our world. I do it often when I'm confirmation, and what I often find in confirmation is similar to what we're finding in our scripture; because it's easy to get stuck in the image itself. If I talk about being a team with God as being a player on a basketball team inevitably, in my confirmation class, we start talking about basketball. What's our favorite team? What position do you play? How good is Jesus? It's easy to get stuck in the image itself.

That's what some of those that were gathered there did. They got stuck in this image of having to eat flesh and drink blood, and it's a hard thing to understand. Who Jesus is, who we are to be in relationship with God is a hard thing to understand. People started complaining because they weren't getting it. It was a hard teaching. They even say to him, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" That's a good question, and it's a question that we need to ask ourselves as we continue to seek to grow in our understanding of God through Jesus; and in our relationship with God. "...who can accept it?"

It's easy to give up when things are difficult, and yet we constantly are encouraged to try to keep going. There's a good saying that's out there, and if you know I'm sure you're going to jump in and say it with me, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That encourages us to say, 'Just because we don't get it now doesn't mean we won't ever get it.' I found that with school. I didn't always understand math. Geometry was not my friend. I claim that. But I didn't give up trying to understand geometry. And I was blessed with a teacher that understood I was struggling, and took the time to work with me; to explain it in ways that I could understand so that I could learn what was going on.

Jesus tries to do that with our scripture. He's used the image of bread and they've gotten caught in, 'Well our ancestors ate the bread from God, the manna in the wilderness, and that fed them,' and Jesus is trying to tell them, 'I'm trying to give you so much more than just what's going to keep you going here. I'm going to give you so much more that's going to take you on to eternal life.' Then he says, 'It's the Spirit. It is the spirit that gives life, not the food that you eat.' The spirit gives you a life with God, and the spirit's going to be a part of Jesus gift to God's people. But there were still some that just couldn't believe it, and they chose, rather to get going and learn, to turn and walk away. It was just too much for them.

So, Jesus looks at the 12 that he called and he says, 'How about you?' "Do you also wish to go away?" Then my favorite disciple steps up, Peter. I love Peter. I've shared that before, he is *so* human. He is our example that it's OK not to be strong in your faith all the time; that you're going to make mistakes, you're going to doubt, you're going to try and you're going to fail; and yet God still calls you, God still loves you, and God still uses you. So, here Peter is. He steps up. "Simon Peter answered him, "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.'"(emphasis mine)

His response reminds us that Jesus wasn't everybody's cup of tea. Not all people were drawn to Jesus' teachings, but those that were willing to stick with Jesus, even when they didn't get it, even when it became challenging, found a gift beyond this world. "You have the words of eternal life," not life here and now, but life forever with God. Life that will sustain you through the hardest times that we face.

Remember last week and the week before, I shared that Jesus doesn't always take us out of our circumstances, but gives us what we need to sustain us through the circumstances that we face; and that

strength can carry us beyond circumstance into a stronger relationship. Jesus tries to teach his disciples what it means to be one with God. He has already said to them, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as ..." simile, "...the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me." It's that intimate, connected relationship, which is their foundation. But what I really love about how Peter responds is he recognizes it that it's a process. They didn't just, boom, believe everything about Jesus, but by walking with Jesus, listening to him, learning from him, they have *come to*, right? He says, "We have come to believe and know..." Didn't always know it, but stuck with Jesus: listened, watched, learned, and have come to.

What a gift to us. We don't have to know or understand everything about God right now. But we can know that as we continue to come to God, as we continue to stick with it, even in the tough times, that our relationship, our faith in God through Jesus, can be that foundation that we need to be able to withstand. That's where that full armor of God comes into play. Jesus gives the gift through the Holy Spirit, not just for the people that were around him, but to all of us as well.

But notice he doesn't force faith. Some said "no", and turned and walked away. The 12 said, 'Yes, you have what we need. You have what we long for. You are the one to connect us to God.' It started from the beginning, and our scripture from Joshua affirmed, that we need to choose. "Choose this day whom you will serve." Choose this day with whom you will be in relationship. We are invited, invited to abide in Jesus, and have Jesus abide with us. But again, it's our choice. Are we willing to stick with Jesus even when it feels as if Jesus isn't around? Are we willing to stay in relationship with God, and hear and learn difficult and challenging lessons? Or, are we going to take a step back? The blessing is it's not a one-time decision. We are offered the choice each moment of every day. So, we are asked by our God, "Do you also wish to go away?" Choose this day with whom you will be in relationship. The choice is yours. What will we decide?

Let us pray. Holy Lord and God, we thank you. We thank you that through you we can abide not just in this life, but for eternity. We thank you that through Jesus we have a Living Word that gives us eternal life. And we thank you that you give us the opportunity to choose you. Thank you for all the blessings you give. Help us, Lord God, to be open to the lessons you still have to teach us, today and every day. We pray this in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.