

John 6:56-69

⁵⁶Those 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 confirmation class last week we went sped through the history of the church in 30 minutes. One of the stops along the way brought us into the sanctuary, where we opened the hymnbooks to page 15, The Nicene Creed and talked about the controversy that caused Emperor Constantine to call the council together, debate, and make a decision about whether Christians say that Jesus is literally the son of God or figuratively like a son of God. They decided, of course, that Jesus Christ is the son of God, made of the same God stuff as God. Fully human yes, but also fully divine. They weren't the first to ask the question Who is

Jesus? In our gospel reading this morning, for the sixth Sunday in a row we read Jesus' bread imagery. But of course all along, the underlying question is, "Who is this Jesus?"

Up until this point the people have been very uncomfortable with Jesus' answer. And now Jesus just makes them more uncomfortable. Jesus says he is the bread that came down from heaven, sent by the father. That's unbelievable to his hearers. In fact, many of his own disciples say, "This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?" Jesus doesn't really make it easy for those struggling with his identity; he doesn't soften the message at all. They realized that he was asking them to commit to something that looked impossible. How could somebody who was so obviously human to them claim to literally come from God? After all, they knew who his parents were. The disciples are scandalized. Many of his disciples are so scandalized that they turn away and stop following him entirely. But then there are the other disciples and Peter. They agree with the others; this teaching is hard, who can accept it? The disciples don't really get how Jesus could have come from the Heavenly father either, but they stay. Seeing Peter's edginess, Jesus says, "Do you also wish to go away?"

"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."

This is one of the greatest statements of faith in the entire bible. For all of Peter's faults, one has to be completely disarmed by his simple, revealing statements of uncomplicated faith.

Lord, to whom shall we go?" [John 6:68]

Maybe you've seen the movie Family Man with Nicholas Cage. In the movie Nicholas Cage is a highly successful CEO who gave up a life where he could have married his college sweet heart so that he could pursue an internship. At Christmas, an angel gives him the opportunity to see what his life could have been like had he turned down the internship. He wakes up in his new life and struggles as he has to navigate new challenges as a father, husband, and middle class working man. He hates his new life, until he grows to love it. Then he wakes up again in his real CEO life and wishes with everything in him to have that life as a family man back. Seeing what his life could have been like, he has a taste of a life that satisfied the deepest hungers he didn't even know he had. Having tasted of the bread of life, his regular old bread as a CEO tastes bland, stale, and empty. And having heard Jesus, Peter cannot ever be satisfied again by the old bread of his old life. Peter and the twelve had other lives before Jesus. From tax collector to fishermen they had careers, families, and homes. But now his fishing equipment looked like a bunch of trinkets and reminders of hollow past times. He remembered that he had once enjoyed his life the way it was, but he could as

Thomas Wolfe said, “never go home again.” What would he want with those things? Though at this moment he is thinking, following Jesus could be a wild goose chase, Peter was all in. Without Jesus, life would be like a pencil without lead, pointless.

The disciples, just like us, had other choices but ultimately they placed themselves in positions where Jesus was their only remaining choice: “Lord, to whom shall we go?”

This is perfect faith, not just a statement, but total reliance; placing oneself in complete dependence upon Jesus. Those closest to Jesus had burned the bridges behind them so that even when the statements of Jesus became increasingly more difficult there was no other place for them to go. It was following “without a net.” Faith is deepened in situations where it is difficult to rely anymore on our reason or abilities. Yet, what is amazing about these five words, “to whom shall we go?” is that the disciples had purposely placed themselves in positions where self-reliance was no longer possible. Most of us might find ourselves in that position, but how many of us try and place ourselves in that position?

So many of us do all that we can to not place ourselves in positions of vulnerability, but here we have Peter and the others who sought out a complete dependency upon Jesus. And, from that dependency, comes the ultimate statement

of faith. It is not, “we choose to believe in Jesus.” Neither is it, “it’s popular to believe in Jesus.” But, it was, “to whom shall we go?”

We have no options, Lord. We have given up everything else. We have placed ourselves in a situation where we have no choice but to keep following you. I think the ultimate statement of faith is “to whom shall we go?” This statement comes from life of taking steps to be totally dependent, reliant, and available to Jesus our loving Lord.

It is scary, to think of giving up all of our control. Yet, whose direction is best able to keep us close to God’s love, his or ours? Giving up control is exactly what Jesus is asking for. People continue to follow Jesus and ask the question who is Jesus. That question is a tired question. It’s been asked constantly since Jesus came to us. But it is also a question that seems to be asked with the motive of gaining control of our faiths. We want to make Jesus into our own image, from the counsel of Nicea to the quest for the historical Jesus, to the Jesus seminar movement of a few years ago, to the curiosity surrounding the Divinci Code. But Jesus doesn’t want us have easy answers or control. Those things lead to Phariseeism and ugly things like the crusades or church controlled states or state controlled churches. Jesus wants us to be dependant on him, the mysterious Jesus. He wants disciples to follow him, and abide in him. He doesn’t want it to be easy. He says, “⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in

them.” We take communion because we want to abide with Jesus each day and minute of our lives. But the greek verb translated eat my flesh, is not just eat but chew like chewing gum. The point is that as food goes, Jesus isn’t supposed to go down easy.... It takes a lot of chewing – a lot of struggle to be a disciple.

This week, let’s look within each day for one more way that we can make ourselves increasingly reliant upon Jesus. Perhaps, we will someday find ourselves able to make the ultimate statement of faith (along with Peter and the twelve),

“Lord, to whom shall we go?”