

Pentecost 13-August 22, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

John 6:56-69

“You Have the Words” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from his son, Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven come down for you, Amen.

“This teaching is difficult.” This is how many of Jesus’ disciples responded when he told them that his flesh was true bread, and his blood was true drink.

For many students in our community, this was just the first week of school. I would hope that only a few students were complaining about the difficulty of assignments given so far. Usually at least for a few days when school begins, there is a time for review and to get back into the swing of learning again before being introduced to more difficult lessons.

Today’s reading from John from the 6th chapter does not mark the beginning of the teaching of Jesus. The first lesson that John records in the first chapter of his gospel is that Jesus IS the word of God, and he was with God when God spoke all things into being as described in the creation story in Genesis. John the Baptist takes over teaching for a short time. He points his students and disciples to follow and listen to Jesus who is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus then recruits his first students, his 12 disciples, who he teaches his power to perform miracles, cure the sick and raise the dead. These disciples witnessed Jesus turn water into wine and a boy’s lunch into a feast for thousands with baskets of leftovers. Jesus teaches Nicodemus that he must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus teaches the woman of Samaria that by drinking his water, she will never be thirsty again. Jesus teaches his disciples and the Pharisees that he is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Many of these things were difficult to understand, but when Jesus began teaching that he is the bread of life come down from heaven, it was this lesson that became too difficult and most of his new followers, also named disciples of Jesus, responded, “Who can accept such a teaching?”

Jesus especially seemed to have crossed into new subject material when he said, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” They wondered, “What in the world is Jesus talking about?” After the Jews heard this teaching from Jesus, they

argued among themselves and the only solution they thought for what they heard, was to pack up their notebooks and quit this kind of school and look for another that would teach lessons that were more logical and easier to follow.

Jesus adds to the difficulty of understanding what he was teaching by asking this larger group of disciples what they would think if they saw the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? These students didn't even know what kind of notes to take or questions to ask before Jesus piles more difficult teachings on top of what is already confusing them when he speaks about flesh and spirit and how the flesh is useless, and it is only the spirit that gives life. This larger group of disciples that had been following Jesus also turned from him and followed the path of the Jews and looked for an easier school to enroll in.

I recall one semester at SDSU that was difficult. It was my own fault. I was able to schedule more classes than I should have taken, but I thought I could handle the load. Like the beginning of the school year or the first lessons that Jesus taught, it was ok at first. Everyone had warned me that Genetics taught by Dr. R. H. Whalen required a lot of time, but he was a good teacher. The first few class periods were just a review of the basics of genetics and how to use a Punnett square to predict the percentage of different outcomes by crossing certain parents. But it wasn't long before he was talking about chromosome mapping which I couldn't understand and I wanted to say, "This teaching is difficult, who can accept it." I remember one student saying what was on my mind. He got up in the large auditorium classroom in Ag Hall and interrupted Dr. Whalen and said, "You're crazy" and left the classroom. After a few quizzes, I realized Dr. Whalen wasn't accepting my poor understanding of what he was teaching. I should have dropped the course, but I wanted to get Genetics checked off my list of required courses. So, I looked at the course schedule, hoping to see if I could take Genetics from a teacher where the teaching wouldn't be so difficult. I realized there was only one way to pass Genetics and it was from Dr. Whalen.

Jesus was now down to a small class size of his 12 disciples that he had first called. They had not dropped out yet, but since everyone else had, Jesus asked them, "Do you wish to go away too?" This is when Peter, who is most often remembered for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, this time says just the right words. Peter was not taking a course in Genetics. He was learning about how to receive eternal life. Peter knew that there was no other school to attend or no other teachers giving lessons on eternal life. Peter responds to Jesus' by saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Peter didn't say, "**Where** should we go?" The gift of eternal life is not taught by going to a certain place. Peter didn't find eternal life on the sea of Galilee. Peter didn't find eternal life as he picked up the leftovers on the hillside where the thousands were fed. Peter said, "**To whom** shall we go? Peter knew there was nowhere or no one else to go to. Only Jesus had the words of eternal life.

Many bible scholars have been as confused as the people who first said that this teaching was difficult. They too had forgotten the first thing that John taught about Jesus. Instead of remembering who Jesus said he was from the very beginning, they took what Jesus said about eating his flesh and drinking his blood and fast-forwarded the life of Jesus to the night when he instituted the Lord's Supper and attempted to make this simple teaching about eternal life into a complicated poorly connected story to the Lord's Supper. To know what Jesus meant by being the bread of life and eating him, we need to turn back to the first lesson Jesus taught recorded in John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

The flesh of Jesus is the Word that he speaks to us. We eat his flesh and drink his blood by hearing his word. We are not saved by a complicated formula that is difficult to accept, but by a promise that is received by faith. In a few moments, after Ava Jade Simons is baptized today, I will not ask her if she understands or accepts the promise of eternal life that is given to her today. As Ava grows and begins to be taught by her parents and in Sunday School and through confirmation lessons as promised by her parents and sponsors, she will be taught about this wonderful promise that was given to her on this day. This is a promise you cannot run from or reject. It is a promise that we can only respond to as Peter did, "Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. Amen