

John 6:60-69

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 29, 2021

You can find about anything you want on the Internet or social media. I'm not just referring to the number of topics nor the quantity of material, although they are voluminous. I'm talking about viewpoints. There is so much false information. People pose as experts despite having little or no qualifications. There are claims of presenting science but closer study shows they do not follow the scientific method of inquiry nor have they been subject to procedures of peer review. Those who shout the loudest often know the least. Maybe that's why they are so loud, to project the impression of authority.

The same situation is part of the religious world. We don't need human opinion. We have the Bible so urge

**BELIEVE THE WORDS OF JESUS**

- I. There's a challenge in them
- II. There's life in them
- III. There's no alternative to them

There is a challenge to believing in the words of Jesus for they bring a hard teaching. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" These are not the Jews who had rejected and argued with him earlier. John called them "disciples." They had been following and listening. But the more they pondered what he said, the less they liked it.

Jesus was aware of their feelings. He read their thoughts even if they weren't openly debating him. So he asked, "Does this offend you?" Did they trip and trigger the trap? Sometimes it is rendered as stumbling, but the term refers to more than a false step. I have to be careful not to stumble over my robe as I climb the steps to the pulpit, but if I did, it would only be a minor mishap. The word Jesus used indicates a fatal trap, the loss of faith.

What did he teach that was so hard? He had called himself the living bread from heaven. He was claiming to be true God. That trait was hard to accept because they were familiar with him. They could see his humanity standing before them. How could he be more than that? Would it help if they saw more? "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" Probably it would make no difference. They would find some avenue to explain it away and reject the truth about him. Another hard teaching was when he spoke of eating his flesh. They

viewed it in a physical way, which seemed a gross idea. They needed to get on a spiritual level and understand that he was talking about believing in himself as the Savior from sin.

The whole idea of his grace and forgiveness goes against our reason and pride. We like to think we are able to save ourselves by our own efforts. That self-confidence is doomed because we do not meet God's standards. Instead of doing good we sin daily, or should I have said hourly or each minute? We don't like to admit our sorry state. It has been said that the three hardest words to speak in any language are, "I was wrong." We need to look to Jesus for rescue because we have no personal credit to claim.

You and I share attitudes similar to those who found the teachings of Jesus hard to accept. We possess the same sinful flesh that prides itself in what we do and rejects our need for a deliverer. Or we place our reason higher than the Lord and want to stand in judgment over God and his Word. There are numerous challenges to our human logic in Christianity. There is the existence of God as eternal, with no beginning or end—everything else has a starting point—"Who made God?" we ask. Or there is his being three persons yet one God. That exceeds our ability to visualize. The nature of Jesus as both God and man doesn't fit into our minds either. That God could create the universe and everything in it in six days by giving the command, "Let there be..." is another marvel beyond understanding. The human mind with its powers of reason is a useful gift but we need to place our reason subject to the Word of God.

We also need to put down our personal preferences. Some have stated, "I can't imagine a God who would punish people in hell." Whether you can imagine it or not, he will do so when rejected despite his work to save us and his efforts to reach us. Any number of teachings of the Bible are unpopular, but remember, who is number one? The answer is God, but we often want to be the boss, the determiner of right and wrong, of what is true and false. Wasn't that at the heart of the temptation brought to Eve—you can be like God?

## II.

So yes, there are challenges in the words of Jesus but they are oh so precious. There's life in them. As Jesus had showed with his miracle of feeding the multitude, he is true God. He's even bigger than a provider of food; he is the Savior, the living bread from heaven. He is the eternal Son of God who came to our world. He lived among us not to find out what human life was like, but to keep divine law in our place. He took our sins on himself and died to pay for them. It was an enormous penalty but he paid it in full. He demonstrated that his sacrifice

was complete by rising from death. We are forgiven, set free from sin, its consequences and its control.

That freedom last eternally. We will have life in heaven. The assurance about living forever was repeated frequently in the past weeks. Glories await us in heaven. That's what the words of Jesus tell us.

Not only are those words good news but they are powerful. The Holy Spirit works through them and calls us to believe. He leads us to confess our wrongs and inability to save ourselves. He points us to Jesus for all that we need. We now see him as our rescuer from sin and the consequences we deserved, eternity in hell and its misery. He plants faith in our hearts, then builds our faith ever stronger as we take in more of his words and dig deeper into them. He enables us to withstand temptations and silence doubts when they arise.

We have that spiritual life now. A heart touched by the words of Jesus not only accepts those words as true. It wants to live for Jesus by following his ways. We call that our life of sanctification. The apostle Paul refers to saints living in various locales in his epistles. That's how God views us through faith in Jesus, but we don't instantly become completely holy in our lifestyle. It is a growing process. We gain strength for Christian living through the gospel in God's Word and sacraments. We receive forgiveness for the steps we take backwards into sin. Motivation for the new life comes from his love and sacrifice for us. Direction is in his Word. The Spirit gives us power to implement our desire to serve our Savior. He leads us to follow the ways of right.

Thus our behavior will bring glory to God's name. Filled with his message, we tell others. The Lord is honored by our praise and the Word we share brings the same response in those who hear us as they believe and receive life.

### III.

When you consider what we have in Jesus there's no alternative. However, some left him. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." They had enough. They wanted no more. Many headed away. It had to be disappointing to Jesus since he came to save the world.

The situation led him to pose a question to the Twelve. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus knew the answer as the question showed he expected to hear that they wouldn't join the departing throng, but he wanted them to evaluate why they were following him. Verbalizing their faith would strengthen it.

He was correct. The Twelve were staying. "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'" Speaking not only for himself but also for his companions, he stated their intentions. There was no real alternative. Jesus brought what they needed. No one else did.

What's more, "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Their time learning from the Master convinced them of the truth. Jesus was the one set apart (the meaning of holy) and consecrated for the mission of saving the world from sin. He was the promised Messiah. He delivered on those promises. They would continue to follow him whatever came.

It was the Holy Spirit who produced that certainty in the hearts of Peter and the other disciples. It was like Joshua's declaration in the First Lesson this morning, that he and his family would remain faithful to the true God. It didn't matter what the rest of the people around them did. The Spirit has worked the same in us as well. We know the truth which will withstand doubts and enticements to abandon the faith. Plenty of them exist, bombarding us from within our sinful nature and from without, from the things we read and hear in the world around us, which does not accept the true God and his Word and ways. But when you know the forgiving, freeing gospel, you want to go in no other direction. Sometimes we will fall flat on our faces in our trek through life. Don't give up and turn away. Keep taking in the Word, thankful for its message of forgiveness, life and salvation. Live each day in peace and joy as you believe the words of Jesus.

It is sad to see rejection of our Savior as it is a waste of all he did for those who turn away. We do what we can to prevent it. Make sure you are not among those departing. Stay close to Jesus and his words of saving truth. Experience life through his Word, life now in harmony with your Savior and life eternal before his throne in heaven.