

John 6: 41-69
October 3, 2015
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
Worldwide Communion Sunday

Even Jesus' spin doctors could not save him from this media disaster. Up to this point he had the crowds literally eating out of his hand. At the beginning of this chapter he fed five thousand men and an uncounted number of women and children. He had to escape because they wanted him to make him king.

The next day the crowd gathers again. The speech is a hit. Don't just work for the bread that only fills your stomach for a few hours. I am the bread of life. Feed on the love that my heavenly father sends through me. If any one comes to me I will never drive away. People are falling all over themselves to sign up as disciples. You can almost hear Whoopi Goldberg in "Sister Act" leading them in "I will follow him; follow him wherever he may go..."

I have to believe that for Jesus it is starting to get out of hand. It's a little crazy now. And so he writes a sermon for Sabbath worship at Capernaum. Now, had Peter seen the sermon ahead of time, I think he would have stolen it. For what it said was flat out offensive. To the ears of the Jews who gathered and the big crowd of disciples what he said sounded like the words of a deranged egomaniac.

I am the bread of life.... I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread I will give for the life
Of the world is my flesh....Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood
You have no life in you.

By now Jesus has lost most of his strictly Jewish audience. Now even the so called disciples are grumbling. "This is a difficult saying! Who can accept it?" The word translated

“difficult” is translated literally “hard.” It is hard not in the sense of being merely difficult. It has the sense of being impossible to accept. It is the sort of thing that when you hear it you throw up a fire wall to prevent the meaning to penetrate past the ringing of your ears. The spin doctors know there is no way to explain away the offense of what Jesus has said. The last supper has not happened yet. The crucifixion has not happened yet. And, of course, there has been no resurrection. What Jesus is saying is more gruesome than any cult of human sacrifice. Indeed, even after Jesus had ascended to heaven pagan critics claimed that the Jesus cult was cannibalistic. By the time Jesus is done there are only the Twelve. No doubt they are too shocked to move or speak.

I imagine that when he turns to look at the disciples, he too is trembling. As much as he felt it was necessary to clear the decks of all the fair weather followers, he had to be hurting. The silence by the Sea of Galilee had to be deafening. Jesus is back where he started. Or is he? What about these? Are they just too shocked to move away? Are they staying because of some blind loyalty? Are they already planning some way to let him down gently and get on with lives that can make sense again?

“What about you? Do also wish to go away?” I believe the question is genuine. He can start again with twelve disciples. But he needs them to be brutally honest. If he is to start over must be willing to hang in there with a teaching that on the surface turns their stomachs. They must be willing to trust that there is a deeper wisdom which lies beneath the graphic images. They must trust the man who has been their beloved teacher since he called to them from this very lake shore.

Peter’s response is so real. Listen again to his words:

Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.
We have come to believe that you are the Holy One of God.

He *does not say* that they do not want to go away. On a deep gut level they may like to put some serious distance between themselves and this man they thought they knew. What he says is, “Lord, *to whom* can we go? There are no other teachers like Jesus. There are no other churches ready to receive disaffected disciples.

More importantly, what Peter says implies that he and the other disciples *cannot go* back to the simple and predictable lives they had before they began to follow him. They have heard too much. They have seen too much. They have had vistas opened in their lives that they never knew existed. To whom else could they go? To turn their back on Jesus at this point would lead to a life of bitterness, disillusionment and a howling emptiness in the soul. In Jesus there is something to live for. In Jesus there is a purpose in life far beyond the day to day life of earning a living, growing old and dying. In Jesus there is the hope that life is so much bigger than what humans can ever imagine. Indeed, seeing the world the way Jesus sees it, they get a fleeting yet thrilling glimpse of the way God sees *them*—precious, beloved, irreplaceable, all worthy a love bigger than one lifetime can hold.

So in a way that makes no earthly sense, Peter continues, “We have come to believe that you are the Holy One of God.

Friends, this morning when millions of Christians gather around the world to share in the body and blood of Jesus which is represented in the bread and the cup, we must not come to this moment lightly. There is a cost to being a disciple of Jesus that is more than the cost giving our money and our time. There is a cost of choosing to look to this human being who in this day is being abandoned by people who no longer find being believing in his death and

resurrection, his broken body and shed blood worthy. It is not suited to the modern lifestyle. It is boring, routine and contains impossible beliefs. We who remain sometimes wish we could go too. But we have heard, seen and felt too much. In his company and in the company of our sisters and brothers vistas have opened which the world of our culture can never open. We have found a love that is too big for one lifetime to hold. And so we come, not ashamed because we do not understand it all. We come because we trust. We come in the hope that when we eat the bread and drink from the cup we will not just taste these things we will be filled with him. Amen.