

John 6: 56-69
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We have been reading these past few weeks from the book of John, but I have not been preaching on it directly not just because the book of Ephesians was calling to me with greater insight but because this chapter of the book of John is difficult to understand. It is the culmination of the gospel, the meat and potatoes, well really the bread; the bread of Life. It is complicated to understand and has even been used inappropriately in some cases. Some literalists would say it is cannibalistic, all this eating of flesh and drinking of blood. But it is also here in the scripture where we hear that many of those who had been following Jesus broke away and, we assume, went home.

They found it hard to keep believing, and let's face it many of us may have been turned off by this kind of talk. Think about if you had been there, following Jesus about, watching him do good things, healing people, freeing people from their anxieties and fears, seeing the miracles he was performing in front of your eyes; but now he is preaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood and it doesn't sound so much like a metaphor this time, he sounds serious; Adamant even.

"Does this offend you?" Jesus asks them. What would be your response? "Does this offend you?" Once again, I am challenged in my own faith and have to say I may have been one of those who walked away from Jesus at this time. Come on, you have to admit it; it sounds a bit odd; eating flesh and drinking blood. It just may have been the last straw for some believers.

Today, we read this passage and we have a different understanding of eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking the blood of Jesus. We see the Eucharist as taking in Jesus symbolically through the bread and the cup; that kind of eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus.

What we are going to concentrate on is the significance of the people walking away from Jesus for us today. Let's face it we have all walked away from Jesus at one time or another. It seems to happen to most of us in our teenage years or our early 20's; that time in our lives when things we have always believed don't make as much sense to us now. It all seems a little farfetched. We need time to sort it all out. Many of us have believed in Jesus up to a point and then walked away when something came up that we didn't understand or couldn't face.

Let's think about this for a moment. Haven't we all had times where we have said can there really be a God? Can we believe in a God who allows all these bad things to happen in our world? When natural disasters take out whole cities and towns; when children become sick and die; when our loved one leaves us for someone else and we awake alone at night wondering why they no longer love us; when we have become unemployed and we wonder how this ever happened to us and if you will ever find

another job; or when you think of family and wonder if they will ever get along. Moments like these are the kind of moments when it is hard to believe in a loving, caring, God who is always there for us. Where is our good God in all of this? Even if we have believed before we may wonder if it was all a joke; unreal; believed in vain and again we come back to that question, “what if we had it all wrong all along?”

Jesus, seeing that others were leaving asks the disciples, “Do you also wish to go away?” Peter’s response, “To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” must have been music to Jesus’ ears. The close disciples at least had understood. And Jesus may have added, finally! You have the words of eternal life.

And here is another reason why I have avoided this chapter until now. Eternal life. The meaning of eternal life not as we understand it but as Jesus intended it. That’s right I have information that may contradict what some of you have always believed to be true. Most of us when we hear the words eternal life think about life after death; something far away from us, removed from us; our life is here, eternal life is there; is that a fair assumption?

We die here on earth, a bodily death, and go on to live an eternal life, a spiritual life, with Jesus and God in heaven, a designated place, away; right? Well here it is folks, eternal life really refers to life as it was meant to be in God’s time and place. A time when the lion lies down with the lamb, when there is enough food and water for all people and it is shared equally; a time of no tears or pain inflicted on one another. The unity of all things added up into the sum total, Christ. (Paul G. Janssen, “Living The Eternal Life Now”, Lectionary Homiletics, August/September 2009) A time of Eden.

This eternal life takes out the ego and allows us to live the fullest life we can with our very own creative abilities because we will be so filled with the glory of God we will be fully alive. A well known preacher Frederick Buechner was asked to define eternal life and he said this: “to be with God as Christ is with God, and with each other as Christ is with us.” To live free of the drags on life that we experience now; those things that bring us down and keep us down. “To be with God as Christ is with God, and with each other as Christ is with us.”

So, with this new understanding of living our eternal lives now we can, perhaps more easily understand what Peter meant when he says to Jesus, “you have the words of eternal life.” We have been told already how to live this eternal life but we rarely do it, fully and continually we never seem to be able to do it. What are those words of eternal life?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as you love yourself. The words of eternal life, life as it should be here and now and forevermore, eternally. Not something removed and away awaiting us in another place as our reward for sticking it out in this world; but right here, right now!

Here are more of these words, "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you."

I was reminded as I thought about this part of my sermon this week of this anecdote I read in a book called "How Your Church Family Works" by Peter L. Steinke. It is not original to his writings but he could not find the author so I will give him the credit, anyway, it illustrates our reactive, defensive postures. It is called, "The Lesson"

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathered them around him, he taught them:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,
Blessed are the meek,
Blessed are they that mourn,
Blessed are the merciful,
Blessed are they that thirst for justice,
Blessed are you when persecuted,
Blessed are you when you suffer,
Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in Heaven.

Then Simon Peter said,

"Are we supposed to know this?"

And Andrew said, "Do we have to write this down?"

And James said, "Will we have a test on this?"

And Phillip said, "I don't have any paper."

And Bartholomew said, "Do we have to turn this in?"

And John said, "The other disciples didn't have to learn this."

And Matthew said, "May I go to the boy's room?"

And Judas said, "What does this have to do with real life?"

Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and inquired of Jesus, "Where is your anticipatory set, and your objectives in the cognitive domain?"

And Jesus wept.

When we hear these words, "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you." We have a reaction that is not always our best; it is often defensive and reactive like our disciples in The Lesson. We are asked to do some hard things to bring eternal life to us now and we may not know how.

How we do this is the hardest part; but we're working on it. One way to do it is to recognise that loving God is not a one hour a week job. Did you know that everyday people spend only .6% of their week in worship? A drop in the bucket of time all things considered. We can up our time with God considerably and the work of living an eternal life will become a closer reality. We are asked by God to be co-creators of this reality and being a co-creator with God is how we can move this eternal life closer to reality. By living lives that create joy through loving our neighbours and our enemies. May God bless us as we continue to work toward eternal life. Amen