

Don't Walk Away from the Bread of Life!

You've got your wheat bread, your white bread, rye and pumpernickel, oat, multi-grain, gluten free, raisin, and sourdough, to name a few. There are all sorts of bread you can choose from. Bread is one of the most common types of food in any culture. But no matter what kind of bread you eat, it will only help keep you alive for a few hours or days. If you want to live forever, you need Jesus, the living bread from heaven. This morning we are encouraged, "Don't walk away from the Bread of Life."

To set the scene: Jesus fed a crowd of over 5000 men with just two fish and five small loaves of bread. The next day, the people wanted another free meal. Jesus pointed out to them that having him in their hearts as their Savior was much more important than having more bread in their belly. He said that he was the "Bread of Life." Just like physical bread sustains our bodies, Jesus sustains our souls. The people needed to recognize that Jesus was 100% true God in the flesh. He was not just a miracle maker or social worker. The people only used human logic and rejected Jesus' claim that he was true God who came down from heaven. Jesus explained that they needed to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" in the sense of taking him in and accepting him as true God who is also truly human with flesh and blood as their Savior.

The Jews were still focused on a free lunch as they scoffed (:52), "**How can this man give us his flesh to eat?**" In verse 53-59, Jesus pleaded with the people to listen to him. Even if they had a lifetime supply of physical bread, they would still die. Those who were connected to Jesus by faith, however, would have eternal life. They needed Jesus.

As an aside, I want to mention that it's easy to think that Jesus is referring to the Lord's Supper here in John 6 as he talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. He's not. Whenever the Bible talks about the Lord's Supper, it uses the term "body," not "flesh." We are not cannibals when we come to Communion. Besides, Jesus had not yet instituted the Lord's Supper. Also, Jesus said that we NEED to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to be saved. You do not NEED to take Communion in order to be saved. The child who was baptized but dies before he grows up and is able to take Communion will still go to heaven. By saying that we need to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Jesus is saying that we need

to believe in him as true God who is also fully human with flesh and blood.

After Jesus finished explaining this, many of his followers (disciples) said (:60), "**This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?**" Notice, they did not say that his teaching was hard to understand. They finally understood that he claimed to be true God in the flesh. They understood that he claimed the only way for them to get to heaven was to believe in him. They understood, but they said that it was hard to accept. They had to set aside human reason and logic and admit that God himself was standing right in front of them and talking like a normal human being. He had flesh and blood like any human. He grew up in nearby Nazareth. Could he really be true God, the promised Messiah, their Savior? That was a hard teaching to swallow.

Their sinful human nature was putting a huge road block in their hearts. Earlier, Jesus said that he "came down from heaven." Now he asks them (:62), "**What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!**" When he ascended into heaven after completing salvation, would they believe him then? Probably not. Jesus said that he was sharing words with them that were full of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit who brings people to faith. But they were stubborn and rejected him. John tells us (:66), "**From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**" Last week, I mentioned that chapter 6 was a pivotal point in the gospel of John. Before this, Jesus was pretty popular with large crowds following him. Now that Jesus made it super clear that he was not an earthly social worker, but a spiritual Savior, they walked away.

I imagine tears running down Jesus' cheeks as the people turned their backs on him and shuffled away. By walking away from him, they were walking back to their sin and guilt, back to their earthly focused lives, back to their mixed-up priorities. They were walking away from Jesus and towards hell. How eternally sad. Many of you have felt the same sorrow and sadness as loved ones, even family members, have turned their backs on Jesus. It breaks your heart. You cry.

We need to be careful that we do not look down our noses at those Jews who walked away and pat ourselves on our backs for being so much better than them. Instead, we need to admit, "There, but by the grace of God, go I." We have the same sinful human nature as those Jews. Unless the Holy Spirit, using the Word and Sacraments as his tools, chiseled a

crack into our stony hearts of sin, we would not be in church confessing Jesus as our Savior. Unless the Holy Spirit worked a miracle inside each one of our hearts, we also would walk away from Jesus to everlasting suffering in hell.

We still have a sinful nature living inside of us that rebels against and rejects Jesus. In the Apostles' Creed we recite, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord." We call Jesus "Lord," but do we really mean it? A Lord is someone who is in control of our life. A Lord is someone whom we obey. Do we see ourselves in control of our own lives or do we see ourselves as Jesus' servants eager to do what he wants? The Jews grumbled against Jesus. Do we sometimes grumble when we are reminded that the Lord is the one who has blessed us with what we have and he has a say in how we spend or use our money and time? He has a say in what we look at on our screens. Does it irritate you a bit when you hear the commandments rubbing against you – Don't curse or swear. Go to church. Spend quality and quantity time with God's Word. Jesus has something to say about who you sleep with. He hears and hates it when you talk behind people's backs, or spread rumors, or gossip, or say things to purposefully hurt others. He is sickened when we are selfishly more concerned about ourselves than about others. He is disgusted when husband and wife ignore each other or bicker instead of supporting and caring for each other. He is offended when we complain about how our lives are going. Do we at times grumble against Jesus like those Jews did? Most certainly. There is, indeed, a part of us that wants to walk away from Jesus because we don't want him controlling our lives and telling us what to do.

Notice that even though the large crowd left Jesus, his 12 closest disciples were still standing next to him. After wiping the tears from his cheeks, Jesus asked them (I imagine with a lump in his throat) (:67), "**You do not want to leave too, do you?**" Through his Word, he appealed to them. He told them that he cared about them. He reminded them that they did believe in him. He gently nudged his disciples to admit that he was their Savior. Speaking as the leader of the 12, Peter famously replied (:68,69), "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.**"

Peter knew that he and the other disciples were sinners. They did not deserve God's love. They did not deserve to go to heaven. But he also knew that Jesus was true God in the flesh, even if he could not explain

the physics of it. The Holy Spirit worked faith in the disciples hearts. We, also, confess that we are sinners. At times we struggle with guilt. At times we feel ashamed, worthless, unlovable, not worth saving. Through his Word, Jesus also reaches out to you. Through his Word he brought you to faith and strengthens your faith. Like Peter and the others, you believe and know that you are saved because Jesus lived a perfect life, died an innocent death and rose victoriously to make you holy and to give you eternal life in heaven. Jesus was willing to sacrifice everything he had, including his flesh and blood, in order to save you. Because of Jesus, your sins are forgiven and you are headed to heaven. When we think of our sin and guilt, when we remember that we are going to die, to whom shall we go? Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only Jesus saves. With joy and gratitude we confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord.

That also gives us a different perspective on the commandments. Instead of seeing them as burdens that irritate us, we see them as godly guidelines for how to show praise and thanks to God for saving us and for how to share his love with others. We are glad to follow the commandments.

Through faith, the disciples stayed with Jesus even though the crowd walked away and he was not popular any more. When you face opposition for being a Christian, when others at work or school make fun of you for your faith, when people walk away from you because of what you say about Jesus, when society accuses Christians of being hateful and hurtful, when the devil nags your conscience and the world tempts you to walk away from Jesus, when life is not going well and it seems as if Jesus isn't there and doesn't care, remember Peter's words, "**Lord, to whom shall we go?**" There is no other person or place to find forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus is the world's only Savior and you have him in your heart. No matter what, do not walk away from the Bread of Life. Amen.