

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 12B (Proper 15B)  
August 15, 2021  
John 6:51-69

### Will You Stay or Will You Go?

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (John 6:53-55 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

The song "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" by the Clash is about indecision in a relationship. It's a question asked especially when talking about marriage, other relationships, your job, or even whether someone should remain in a particular church or not. And the question may be asked even if there is no conflict, abuse, or harm involved. But from what I can tell, the answer to the question usually boils down to whether you are happy, or fulfilled, or something similar. It all depends on how you feel and not on what is right and God-pleasing or on promises made.

So those listening to Jesus had heard Him say some hard things – that He is the bread of life which came down from heaven, that He would give His life for the world, that all who believe in Him He would raise on the last day. But the talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood was too much. So most of them left.

Jesus is the "living bread which came down from heaven." He gave His flesh for the life of the world as He died on the cross so that every person, every sinner, every one of you, might have life for eternity. The flesh of His back would be torn with the whip, and with those stripes you are healed (Isaiah 53:5). His Blood would pour out from His wounds as He hung upon that cross. In that sacred Blood, shed for the sins of the world, the perfect payment for your sinfulness and for all your wrongs is found. In that blood is your life.

You'd think everyone would eat that up. Who wouldn't want to live forever? Who wouldn't want to receive the life God gives in and through His Son? But sadly, there are many who refuse this gift of life. There are many who refuse to hear Jesus' words and believe them, then and now. What was said of those who heard Jesus, is true of many today. "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." It's quite disturbing that so many who had followed Jesus, heard Him preach and teach, seen Him do miraculous deeds would now leave Him.

So what happened? Quite simply, they couldn't stomach what Jesus had said. They were disturbed that they should believe in Jesus and that He would raise them up on the last day. But

when He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54), that was too much. After all, they weren’t cannibals. Those who left Jesus found His words to be “hard.”

And the reason they’re hard words is that we want to remain in the comfort of our sin and unbelief. Jesus doesn’t stroke our egos by telling us how good we are. He doesn’t scratch our itching ears by telling us what we want to hear, what makes us feel good about ourselves. He doesn’t let us remain in the comfort of our self-deceit or self-righteousness by holding out the false hope that our efforts could in any way make God favorably disposed toward us. Rather He calls us to repentance and to believe that He is the only Savior, the only way to heaven and eternal life, and yes, to eat His body and drink His blood. And like those who left Jesus that day, we too have a hard time believing His words.

So those disciples walked away from life with Jesus because they didn’t like what they heard. Their hearts were hard. St. Paul writes, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them for they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The people left because they didn’t believe Jesus’ words, and they didn’t believe *in* Him. They didn’t believe that the One speaking to them was God-in-the-flesh. They didn’t believe Jesus’ words that He is the only source of salvation. They didn’t believe that Jesus had come to save them from their sins. So they left, not because of the law, not because Jesus told them they had to do anything or give up something. They left because they wouldn’t receive Jesus and the gifts He came to give.

Yet, even more amazing is that Jesus didn’t go running after them, apologizing for offending them. He didn’t chase after them and try to make everything alright. He wasn’t worried about what the annual report might show. He wasn’t at all concerned with popularity. One might even think that Jesus didn’t care about them or that He was a failure because so many people left Him.

But such is not the case at all. After all, “God our Savior... wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9). So Jesus did care about those who left Him, just as much as He cared about the few who stayed. He continued to love them in spite of their rejection and their leaving. He loved them enough to allow Himself to be betrayed by Judas, mocked and beaten, nailed to a cross, and hung up to die for them. He loved them enough to carry their sins in His own body so that they would be forgiven. He loved them enough to do everything necessary for them to go to heaven, including suffering rejection by them and His Father. He loved them enough to call them to repentance and faith. But they refused to believe and they rejected Jesus’ words of eternal life.

It still happens. There are people who are offended at Jesus’ words - some because He condemns what they desire to do, and others because they think there are other paths to heaven. Some have left after being confirmed, despite their promise to remain faithful. Some stop following Jesus out of apathy, they just don’t care, and worse, some who have heard of

Jesus and His love for them just don't want anything to do with Him. They have hardened their hearts so that everything Jesus says is "a hard saying." So they stay away from hearing Jesus' words and remain in unbelief.

Yet, the Twelve didn't leave. They stayed. They had heard the same words as those who left. But, by God's grace, they had come to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. Through the Holy Spirit, they had taken His words to heart. Not that they understood everything He said, because they most certainly did not. In fact, they often showed they hardly understood anything Jesus had said. But they believed Jesus had come to save them from their sins. They hung on Jesus' every Word for His Word and words give life.

So will you stay or will you go? By God's grace you have been baptized into Christ's death and have heard the saving words of our Lord Jesus. By God's grace alone you have been brought to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Like Peter you have learned to confess, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." God grant that you stay faithful to Him and His Word, that you continually hear all of Christ's words and not be offended by them, that you rejoice in the abundant life He gives you as you eat "the Living Bread which came down from heaven" "which He gives for life of the world" (v. 51), and that you joyfully confess that Jesus alone has "the words of eternal life" and that He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." And in such faith eat His flesh and drink His blood, for in them you have life in abundance, now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener