

<sup>51</sup> *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*"

<sup>52</sup> *At that, the Jews argued among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

<sup>53</sup> *So Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. <sup>54</sup> The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, <sup>55</sup> because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna<sup>[a]</sup> your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever."*

<sup>59</sup> *He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.*

<sup>60</sup> *Therefore, when many of his disciples heard this, they said, "This teaching is hard. Who can accept<sup>[b]</sup> it?"*

<sup>61</sup> *Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, "Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup> The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn't help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. <sup>64</sup> But there are some among you who don't believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not<sup>[c]</sup> believe and the one who would betray him.) <sup>65</sup> He said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father."*

<sup>66</sup> *From that moment<sup>[d]</sup> many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the Twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you?"*

<sup>68</sup> *Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."*

### Chew on it

Over time scientists have studied the dental records of people of the past. Those with the worst dental health are found in civilized society. We have sugar, processed grains, food that is easy to chew, much of which can be swallowed without any effort. Those with the best dental health eat natural unprocessed foods. They're teeth are perfectly healthy, no cavities, no need for braces, but there is something different. They're worn down. They've used them over their life and there isn't much tooth left. They eat hard foods, food that require a lot of work to eat, and lots of chewing.

What Jesus offers us today isn't a diet of processed food. It is anything but soft. In fact his disciples describe it as "hard." It may look like a barely loaf that's a few weeks old by now. It's tough bread making it even harder to chew on. But Jesus doesn't want them to eat more bread. This week it's his flesh and blood and that doesn't sound so appetizing. It's enough to turn off 5,000 people from following him. They didn't like what he had to offer. They didn't believe it. They refused to stay and eat.

This morning if you do anything, remain and chew on this. It takes time. Hard bread requires work but once again we are reminded this is the work of the Father. No one can say Jesus is Lord apart from the Holy Spirit. Once again we find Jesus point away from our work, our chewing, our eating, our anything and direct us to his flesh and blood alone. Chew on it. Where else are we going to go? Jesus alone has the bread of life.

John 6 starts with over 5,000 seeking for Jesus. They wanted to make him king. They're coming to him, eager to know, "*What must we do to do the works of God?*" And Jesus says, "You can't do the work of God." The work of God is this, "*That you believe.*" Jesus may be offensive and obnoxious but they're still with him. The Jews began to grumble last week. But now those that remain are described as disciples and they're grumbling too, but Jesus isn't backing down.

Many commentators have claimed and even I've even said, "They don't understand what Jesus is saying." They're offended by the fact that he is telling them to do something grotesque and offensive to the first century Jew. But John lets us know when the crowds don't understand such as in John 10:6. But here I think we've applied the fallacy of stupid people of the past. (I made that up). It's this idea that everyone older than us is dumb and just don't get anything. When the truth is we often struggle even with 20/20 hindsight. Could we live, function, and construct societies larger than our own without a smartphone or computer.

Now I'm certain that they understood Jesus. They are scandalized not by the thought of cannibalism but by the claim Jesus is making. Jesus doesn't sound like he's trying to further enlighten and explain. Rather he sharpens the point of his argument in order to raise the offense. This conversation turns to a crisis. They cannot believe what Jesus has to say.

They're scandalized, not so much by the idea of cannibalism but by the claim that Jesus was making. The scene was set for us back in John 6:4. The Passover was near. The Passover celebrated the deliverance from death through the lamb whose flesh was eaten and whose blood was placed upon the doorposts. This separation of flesh from blood didn't happen without death. Jesus has already be pointed out as, "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Jesus claim is that he is the God of Israel who will provide for his people by giving his flesh and blood for the world. That separation of flesh from blood happens as the result of a violent death. They don't like it at all. This is the cross.

They wanted to make him King and if we're honest I'd like to see him as a king too. If Jesus is glorified and honored then I'll be glorified and honored. We want Jesus to be popular and loved by all. It hurts to see those we love turn away from the church and walk away because they don't like the meal he's prepared. But many have settled for the processed food you don't even have to chew to swallow. They want the white bread, crust cut off, cursory glance of Christ but a meal that requires work, to read, learn, and inwardly digest... that takes time and we're used to fast food. But the food Jesus offers is flesh and blood, violent suffering and death. But we don't want the way of the cross. We'd rather have the way of glory. God comes down and all our problems are solved. We may even want a prosperity gospel but the way of Jesus is that of flesh and blood and being lifted up.

Or maybe we're offended not because we don't understand Jesus but because of what we do understand. We might not like what he has to say. Those pesky things that are offensive to our American ears, "*The flesh counts for nothing but the Words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life*. It's offensive to our American sensibilities because we often believe we can pull ourselves up. But the flesh counts for nothing. It doesn't help at all. It cannot see eternal life coming to us freely by grace. The flesh cannot understand that life comes to us by participation in the death of Jesus. The normal way our world works is that you must work to earn. You must do something and Jesus throws that idea out the window. Often we don't like what Jesus has to say because we're proud of our works our best efforts. So we'll just use Jesus as a stepping stone and move up the ladder of success. But we don't want to die to self. We want Jesus to pat us on the back, tell us we've done a good job we've been doing.

Jesus sharpens the point. He gives us a "hard saying," to chew on. He wants us certain that it is not because of our works or anything that we've done but only him. His flesh, his blood.

And he directs our attention to where that flesh is going. What if you see the Son of Man ascending? This is his "going up." In John's Gospel Jesus returns to the Father by way of the cross. John speaks of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. Will they be able to see the glory of God there? With the help of the Spirit, they can. The flesh doesn't help. It counts for nothing. It's not seen by the flesh or the decision of man as John says in 1:13 but born of God yes they may see and eat. In verses 63-65 <sup>63</sup> *The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn't help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* <sup>64</sup> *But there are some among you who don't believe.* (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not<sup>a</sup> believe and the one who would betray him.) <sup>65</sup> *He said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father."*

Jesus points to his own words as life, to the Spirit as the one who gives life, and to the Father as the one who brings people to Jesus. Faith is presented as the work of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This faith leads them to see the son offer up his body which is then beaten and bloodied, strung up on a cross, and pierced for our sin. There on his cross we see Jesus and live. Jesus came down into this world in the flesh so that he might shed his blood for you. There on the cross Jesus is seated in all of his glory delivering the world from sin, death, and the devil. And at the grave he conquers death and brings life to all who believe. And he ascends to the Father.

He then comes to us again and again through water and the word, through bread and wine. How could any of John's audience hear these words and not think of Lord's Supper? *The Jews argued among themselves, "How can he give us his flesh to eat?"* (John 6:52) Here is how. Not through Capernaite eating. It remains a mystery... like the incarnation. Jesus says, "I'm right here where I've always been, right where I've promised to be in Word and Sacrament.

And he will not apologize or change his message to suit the fancies of any. But you can walk away and so he asks, "*Do you want to leave too?*" And Peter answers, "*Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" We can chew on that. It may be hard and difficult. The path ahead for the disciples won't be easy but it will be with God at their side.

*This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?* If we're honest, without the Spirit at work in the word, no one. It's a hard teaching. But we're not alone. God is by our side. He holds us in his hand and nothing outside can pull us away from him. He will deliver us from this wicked world because he was lifted up for you. His flesh and blood were violently separated for you. He gave them to you to reassure and remind you, "This is for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins."

And you believe this not because of a decision you made but because the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart to believe and keep the faith. But that only raises more issues as we see so many walk away but it's not just those outside the church but within her as well. Here we see both the disciples who leave and the one who stays to betray Jesus. Although they went from 5,000 searching to 12 remaining and one betraying, God is still at work. God is at work in the midst of apparent failure and rejection. The church is still where the Word of life is at work among us, through us, and within us. The presence of both Peter and Judas leave us with hope.

Because faith isn't in our hands or our strength but in our God. So we despair of self and hold on to him. We give up our good works realizing that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). We continue to chew on his word and find nourishment therein. We remain with Jesus and find him exactly where he says he will be. He's with us. In the bread and in the wine. Here he's given his flesh and blood for us to eat and drink. We don't need to know how he's done it but we know that we can hold on to his promises and give thanks for it. After faith, after being called by the Holy Spirit you can make choices. You can spend time in the word. You can chew on the hard teachings of Jesus. You can confess your faith to others and share a meal with them.

Your dental records may not look that great. Your teeth may be worn down or they may look like mine, fractured and filled. I only hope those in the future don't dig me up and complain about my teeth or my diet. But may our spiritual teeth not be rotten but worn from use as we chew on the life giving bread, the flesh and blood of our God which he has given for the life of the world. Amen.