

## John 6:60-69

<sup>60</sup>When they heard it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?”

<sup>61</sup>But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this cause you to stumble in your faith? <sup>62</sup>What if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh does not help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. <sup>64</sup>But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not 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 given to him by my Father.”

<sup>66</sup>After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

<sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “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.”

## I Am the Bread OF LIFE

### I.

Isn't it interesting how quickly opinions can swivel? This is now the fifth Sunday in a row that the lectionary Gospel reading has been from John chapter 6. The first of those readings was the miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000. Crowds of people followed Jesus from shore to shore to hear him speak and to see if he would heal their sick.

Their expectations were heightened and their fantasies fueled when they saw how much he could do with just a few loaves of bread and two fish. They had always been looking forward to the Messiah who could free their people from Roman oppression, but now their expectations increased—they now anticipated that he could also make their daily lives easier. What could be better than a life sitting on the couch and watching everything just materialize for you?

This year's lectionary actually skipped over part of John chapter 6, where Jesus walked out on the water to the disciples and stilled the violent storm they were dealing with. Instead we focused on the next day, when Jesus began teaching the crowds in Capernaum that he was about more than just bread for the body. He called himself the bread from heaven—the bread of life. The last three weeks' Gospel readings have all been on Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse.

It is unnerving and disappointing to find out that your expectations are misguided. What a letdown to find out that they weren't going to get free meals! How disturbing that they began to realize Jesus didn't really intend to fulfill *any* of *their* expectations for the Messiah—he probably wasn't even going to break the yoke of Roman rule.

Today's gospel is, at best, late in the afternoon on the day after the Feeding of the 5,000. Just 24-36 hours after being all excited about Jesus, “Many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?” (John 6:60, EHV).

It's understandable that many followers of Jesus would say “this is a hard teaching,” isn't it? These disciples were not the Twelve close disciples of Jesus. They were a collection of followers who came after him for all kinds of different reasons. Some thought he was merely a great teacher. Some thought of him as Messiah. *All* of them came with the

preconceived ideas of the Jewish teachings of the day. It was unimaginable to them that the Laws of Moses could be trying to teach them something different than what they had always thought, or that the prophecies of Messiah were saying something other than what they had always read into them.

The word “hard” refers to something that is harsh or unpleasant. What is it that is really hard? The noun form of the adjective “hard” in the original Greek refers to hardness of heart, or stubbornness. Is it really Jesus’ *teaching* that is hard, or is it the hearts of his hearers? Sinful human beings fail to see the real source of the problem and instead blame Jesus for being harsh, and his teachings for being hard and unpleasant.

## II.

“But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, ‘Does this cause you to stumble in your faith?’” (John 6:61, EHV). There is a striking similarity to the Children of Israel grumbling in the desert about the lack of food until God provided manna through his servant Moses. There was discontent among God’s Chosen People out there in the wilderness. Here there was discontent among people who called themselves followers of Jesus. They weren’t getting everything they wanted.

Our Evangelical Heritage Version translates “Does this cause you to stumble in your faith?” It’s more descriptive of what Jesus was saying than “Does this offend you?” which is what so many other translations use. The word means to ensnare. When a trapper sets a snare, it is intended to catch and kill the animal. The word in Greek is “skandalizei,” from which we get the English word scandal. The teachings of Jesus are so offensive to the unconverted human mind that they are scandalous—they are like a spiritual death trap.

There were always unbelieving Jews that were hostile to Jesus. Today’s batch of unbelievers had *called* themselves followers of Christ, but found him unacceptable and stopped following him.

Christians and pastors like to point at the unbelieving world “out there.” I do it myself on a fairly regular basis. Trouble in the church doesn’t only come from “out there,” does it? It comes from inside the church. Unbelief is demonstrated even by those who are considered followers of Jesus.

Have you paid any attention to the scandal in Pennsylvania in which there was a network of sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests? It certainly isn’t only the Catholic church that is plagued by the bad behavior of people who call themselves followers of Jesus. It has happened in every major denomination. Satan loves to use it to create scandals that will ensnare Christians and eliminate their faith.

“‘There are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not believe and the one who would betray him” (John 6:64, EHV). There are always those who have their own plans and purposes. To achieve their own ends they follow along with the believers, conniving and conspiring all the while to make things work to their own benefit. Pedophile predators in the church aren’t the only problem. So are leaders who’s main intent is their own profit. So even are those who want to teach that what Jesus was all about was improving the earthly lives of people. So was Judas, who might have already been lying in wait to see when would be the best time to betray Jesus.

All threaten the gospel. In fact, unbelievers from *within* the church are a greater threat to the gospel of Jesus than the clear and present dangers that lurk outside in the unbelieving world.

“Does this cause you to stumble in your faith?” (John 6:61, EHV). Scandal from within

can easily threaten *your* faith. Everyone here today could be called a hypocrite. Every one of us sins. The pastor who preaches to you about sin commits sin himself. Too often we betray Jesus by hiding our faith to just “get along.”

“After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the Twelve, ‘You do not want to leave too, do you?’” (John 6:66-67, EHV). Throngs of people followed him wherever he went. The day before Jesus had packed one of those big mega-churches to the rafters. The crowds had followed wanting more.

Now almost all of them were gone.

Big crowds of people don’t always mean there are large numbers of believers. Sometimes quite the opposite is the case. Preaching the truth of the gospel drives *away* unbelieving followers.

### III.

“What if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh does not help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:62-63, EHV).

The words of Jesus *would* drive people to unbelief if he were merely a man. He has, however, described himself as the Bread of Life from heaven. There should be no scandal at all if he is really the Messiah, the Son of God, true God who has come down from heaven.

“The flesh does not help at all.” Human logic isn’t going to be able to believe the words and works of Jesus—the gospel. It takes the Spirit—the Holy Spirit, who gives the gift of faith to the heart.

Ordinary flesh counts for nothing. *Jesus’* flesh counts for everything. He said last week: “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51, EHV). He died for the sins of the world, even the sins of the unbelievers who turn and walk away at his hard teaching. In *his* flesh are the eternal blessings of heaven. “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63, EHV). The message of the gospel is the life the Holy Spirit gives to you by faith.

### IV.

“Jesus asked the Twelve, ‘You do not want to leave too, do you?’ <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, ‘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’” (John 6:68-69, EHV).

Jesus is expecting a “no” answer when he asks if the Twelve want to leave. Peter answers well: “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus is not just one religious option among all kinds of others which all have equal value. There is only *one* way to heaven. Jesus is the only one with the words of eternal life. Anyone who mixes the pure gift of Jesus with actions you must do to help Jesus out a little bit is offering false hope.

Having been brought to faith, follow no one else. “You are the Holy One of God.” There is only *One* who is holy before God—the One who is without sin—the Lord Jesus. The word for Holy One also means saint. Jesus is *the* Saint.

Don’t go with the crowds who disburse from following Jesus. To hear that he is the Bread of Life is a hard teaching, but the Holy Spirit has worked faith in your heart. Because you believe in him you wear Jesus’ righteousness around you like a garment. God sees *you* as a holy one—a saint—because of the faith the Holy Spirit has given you. Live in the life of the Bread of Life. Amen.