

**Trusting our Guide with Our Life©**

**John 6:56-69**

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Once again we begin our focus on bread. Truly, if we were eating this much bread over these past few weeks of Jesus' telling us to eat what he offers us – Living Bread – that is himself – we would be so full of carbs we might just burst!

But that is where we start again with this lectionary text from John. We start here as a reminder of all the dialog that has happened, from the time Jesus fed the great multitude of hungry people with loaves and fishes, to now, when people are just astounded with Jesus' language.

<sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

And John tells us that this is just too hard for the people, and many of his followers (whom John calls disciples, although they are not the same as the twelve disciples) can't take it anymore and they walk away from him.

So, what is it that is so hard? Is it the eating flesh and drinking blood? I mean, that's kind of hard to understand if you've never been taught, especially when they are still trying to figure out who Jesus is. It's hard enough for us, too, isn't it?

We are Easter people, meaning we sort of get it. We believe (or say we do, most of the time) that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross and in that dying, that tearing of his flesh and that blood that flowed, we are forgiven, and we are given life eternal.

We believe when we break bread at the Communion table that somehow we are symbolically and spiritually sharing in the body and blood of Jesus.

But, going back to the people that day who left Jesus because of his difficult teaching – Jesus tells the people he is the bread that comes down from heaven. They must be confused, wondering ... does Jesus mean he is God, or in direct relationship with God?

How can that be, when they all know him to be from Nazareth, son of peasants - the carpenter, Joseph – and his wife, Mary. This is sounding a bit like blasphemy to these dedicated Jewish worshippers.

It was a hard thing to understand. All they wanted was more signs – like more of the food that they were fed when they were hungry – real bread, not flesh and blood!

All they wanted was to see more miracles so they could trust Jesus to be someone important. Maybe someone blessed by God to be a prophet, or a great teacher.

But Jesus was talking crazy talk here ... If *you* had been there, what do you think *you* would have done?

I'd like to say I'd have stuck with him no matter what. But, seriously, at that point in his ministry with people who had not really been in relationship with Jesus, if I'd been there, I fear that I might have been one to not stick around.

And even today, we must continue to say with honesty, "our ears are open" as we listen over and over and over again to the difficult teachings of Jesus.

We look at the scriptures and it doesn't take long to find discrepancies that seem like Jesus is contradicting himself.

Like in verse 54 where Jesus tells us that to eat his flesh is to have eternal life. Yet in verse 63, he says the Spirit gives life and the flesh counts for nothing.

Yes, Jesus' teachings *are* difficult, which is why it's so important to study and to pray and discuss all the possibilities in Scripture.

If we look closely, we can see that Jesus uses flesh in the positive as he is referring to the symbolic bread on the table, representing the humanity of Jesus.

Yet, later he is using the word flesh – this time in the negative sense – to represent the temporary state of mortals, as well as our worldly, materialistic desires and cravings.

It truly is amazing that God would come as human flesh and give us life that will last beyond our mortal state.

But, then after the many people leave Jesus, He turns to his twelve disciples and asks them "Does this offend *you*?" ... "Do you also wish to go away?"

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Why? Why was it that Peter and the other twelve believed and chose to stay with Jesus?

First of all, it surely had to do with the relationship they had built with Jesus. They lived with him, day and night. They watched him with the people – showing compassion, healing, caring for those who were the outcasts and the oppressed.

And think about the many parables and teachings and all the times they sat with Jesus and learned from him, laughed with him, cried with him.

What an example that is for us today who claim to be disciples of Jesus – that is, people who commit their lives to following him and his teachings.

It is by the gift of the Holy Spirit that we first begin to believe, but as we continue our journey of faith – a journey that includes study and prayer, and more study and more prayer; coming to worship with others; hearing the word; praising God – we come to know an intimate relationship with Jesus, our Savior, who gives life abundant and eternal.

I can't help but think about one of our dear members who has now passed from this earthly life to her eternal life with Jesus. Harriet Striggow was a dear woman who I loved visiting with.

As I was there these last few days (and Linda Burns also was there a great deal with her) I sat by her side and read Scripture and believed I saw her face relax.

We don't know exactly what is going on when a person is at that point in life – those very last stages of life here on earth. It may not be anything like this, but sometimes I imagine approaching death and the changes taking place in our bodies, as a storm in the darkness of night.

And yet, I think of Jesus as being that great light – a lighthouse – that reaches out to the one who is looking for safe haven, shining that great, divine light out in the dark so there is no fear...just a calm assurance that we are safe with him; that he is guiding us home.

Besides saying "I am the bread of life," we remember Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world."

And John, in the first chapter of his gospel said, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5 - NRSV)

The Bread of life. The Living Bread. The Light of the world.

When I think about all the storms in our lives, all the trials, the suffering, the confusion – what I know is that while Jesus' teachings are hard, it is worth holding on to every word he says.

When Jesus asked the twelve if they, too, wanted to leave him, I'm guessing that Peter did not fully understand those hard teachings of Jesus either. Nor did the rest of them.

And yet, they were in relationship with him, and that relationship meant trust that had been built, and faith that was growing. They might not have been sure of the *teachings* but they were sure of the *teacher* and they believed that he was the only one they could trust with their lives.

We too, struggle sometimes to understand the hard teachings of Jesus. Yet, the more we know him, the more we know that he is trustworthy, that we can believe, with out fully knowing or seeing, that he is our faithful Lord, our light in the darkness, and that he will guide us safely home where there is life eternal.

Let us continue growing a strong relationship with Jesus, getting to know him more and more, so that we, with Peter, may always say: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

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