

## ***“Do You Want to Go Away?”***

Questions abound in our text for today. Jesus has been saying that He is the Bread from heaven, and that unless you eat His flesh and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Those who had been following Jesus said: “This is a hard saying” – and then they ask – “Who can listen to it?”

Jesus responds with His own questions. “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” And when many of those who had followed Him turned away, Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks: “Do you want to go away as well?”

And then there’s the question that rings out from the mouth of Simon Peter (more of a confession than a question) – “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Like the disciples who followed Jesus in our text – these questions now ring in the ears of those who follow Jesus today. You are the ones confronted with the question – “Do you want to go away as well?”

Now these questions don’t just come out of the blue. We have been listening to John’s Gospel these past weeks and have heard how Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 people with the 5 loaves and 2 fish.

We’ve seen how the people have flocked to Jesus – becoming His disciples, His followers – all because they wanted Him to fill their bellies. They wanted what He had to offer. He satisfied their felt needs. He scratched them where they itched.

But Jesus has come to give them more than just bread for their bellies. He gives them the Bread from heaven – His own flesh which He will give for the life of the world. And that’s when these followers say – “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

How quickly things change. How quickly Jesus goes from a mass following of well over 5,000 people – to a mass exodus – a mass exodus of disciples who no longer follow.

And that is often how it goes in the church today. Followers begin to grumble. Disciples leave because they don't like the preaching – even though it is Jesus who is preaching to them. We would do well to remember that faithful preaching is sometimes met with a growth in numbers (like on the Day of Pentecost) – but at other times faithful preaching is met with a mass exodus.

And yet, notice what Jesus does not do. When all these disciples turn away, He doesn't run after them and say: "I'm sorry ... I didn't mean to say that ... I'll change my message, if you will just come back and be my disciples."

The sayings of Jesus are hard – who can listen to them? He is the Bread of Life, and unless a man eat His flesh and drink His blood, he has no life in him.

Many who hear these words from Jesus' mouth are offended at them because only God can give life – and now this man Jesus claims that there is no life apart from Him. In a world where the teachings of the Jews and the Muslims and everyone else are given equal standing – to say that there is no life apart from faith in Jesus Christ is scandalous.

All that Jesus says is hard on the ears and hearts of hardened sinners. Sin has afflicted us with a sclerosis of the spirit – and ears that refuse to hear and believe His Word. The message of Jesus that gives life ricochets off the stony heart. And instead of confessing to be the source of the problem – we blame it all on Jesus, saying that HE is "hard" and offensive.

That being the case, "who can listen" to Jesus? No one can. No one of his own accord can hear and receive this life – for all have sinned and turned away from the Lord.

This is why Jesus says – "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." No one can come to Jesus – no one can listen to and believe His Word – no one can abide in Jesus, and live eternally – unless the Father draws him to Jesus and gives these gifts.

God's people of Old were faced with the question of whom they would serve – whether they would serve the God who delivered them from Egypt – or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land they were living.

In the Rite of Holy Marriage, the Bride is asked: "... will you have this man to be your husband, to live with him in holy marriage according to the Word of God? Will you love him, comfort him, honor him, obey him, and keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, be wife to him as long as you both shall live?"

That's the question the Bride of Christ is always facing. Should I follow Christ, or turn away and no longer walk with Him. The truth is that we have turned away – divorcing ourselves from Christ our heavenly Bridegroom – walking away from the Word of life eternal.

And yet the Lord has drawn you here this day – to listen to His Word come down from heaven. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," Jesus says. "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Rather than turning and walking away – faith says – "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Your flesh given into death conquers my death. Your blood atones for my sin and the sin of the whole world.

Where else are we to go? To eat your flesh and drink your blood is to have eternal life. To eat your flesh and drink your blood comes with your promise to raise me up at the Last Day.

To whom shall we go? Apart from you there is life – but you have come down from heaven to abide in me – that I may abide in you. And so it is to the Table that you go – to receive the Bread of Life – to eat, and drink, and live forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.