

Decide this Day!

John 6:56-69

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day AMEN.

Last week I ended the sermon posing a question. Do you remember the question? I asked if you were all ready to take part in the sacrament of Holy Communion, to consume, take, chew, swallow the very body of Christ into your being, into your soul, into your heart. Basically I asked if you were ready to take hold of the bread of life? Have you thought about it at all this week? Have you thought about what it means to take in the bread of life? Did it even cross your mind this past week?

For five weeks now we have been hearing about the bread of life. We saw Jesus provide the miracle of the bread for the thousands in the crowds. Their basic earthly need was fulfilled by Jesus that evening on the hillside on the other side of Galilee. Then he returns the next day back to Capernaum and the crowds once again want more food, but Jesus begins to tell them about what he is really about. This world and these earthly needs are temporary and will perish, but he is about the imperishable, the life that lasts forever. He tells them over and over and over that he is the Bread of life. That they must eat of this bread if they want to live. And the bread of life that we must eat is his body and blood. To take a hold of that everlasting eternal life we must eat the body and blood of Christ. And that is when the people go beyond grumbling, beyond fighting, to just walking away. When Jesus first told them this message they grumbled about what he was talking about, how can we eat his body, who does he think he is, what's he talking about. Then we hear Jesus tell them again, and they start fighting about it. They argue sharply about the cannibalism that Jesus is suggesting. And now this week, we hear his own disciples turn to each other and say "This teaching is difficult, Who can accept it" and they "turned back and no longer went about with him."

That's amazing, this is Christ, the Son of God, the one who has fulfilled all the prophecies of the old testament. He has fed five thousand men from just a few fish and loaves of bread. He has turned water into wine. He has made the deaf man hear. Made the blind man see. He has made the crippled man walk. He is the one who has spoken and preached with a new authority that drew crowds of thousands and ticked off the so called religious folks every time and yet the followers turn away because "this teaching is difficult".

Apparently the followers, his disciples who turned away couldn't make that leap of faith to get beyond this world, beyond what their thoughts and opinions, their needs, their hopes and hear the word of life, the word of truth. The word that is hard at times to hear. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Truth, that Jesus is the Word, That Jesus is the Bread of Life, and yet "This is a hard teaching."

It is hard for us to imagine why so many turned away, because we have heard this message over and over and over again. We understand the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. We understand that Christ is the way to the father. We understand that Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life. We know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life everlasting. We know that Christ offers us a place in his kingdom forever, where nothing can separate us from his love. Don't we know all this? Yet, are we not like those other disciples who turn away because it is a hard teaching?

Christ tells us to come follow him. Christ tells us to sell everything and follow him? Christ tells us to pick up our cross and follow him. Christ tells us to lose our life to save it. Christ tells us to love our enemies. Christ tells us to go to all nations baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet have we been living up to these teachings, have you been doing these things? Or are they just too hard, inconvenient, uncomfortable? Only you know if you are truly ready to take part in the bread of life? Are you truly committed to it?

You all know your level of relationship with God. You know the things that nag at you and separate you, and cut you off from God's message. You know when God has called on you to do something and you have turned away. You know the times that you knew the right things that should have been said or done, but yet you took the easy way out. To truly examine ourselves and evaluate our own level of faith is usually a scary thing. The followers of Christ this day hear the words of Christ and realize no they can't live up to that and so they walk away. Did they feel good about it, probably not. Did they feel elated and free, probably not. It was probably a tough decision for these people to make. They had hoped they were doing the right thing. They had hoped they were following the one who would fulfill all their wants and needs. And yet this last teaching was just too difficult to believe and do and so they turned away. What are the tough teachings, the tough sayings in your life of faith that cause you to ponder and question if your committed?

As a pastor I sometimes wonder if whether we are or not committed. As a church family, St. Mark is given a clear message, to go a to our community and beyond sharing the

good news of Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament ministry. Do we do that? Each and every congregation is given the responsibility to teach the word, to offer the sacraments, to share the grace of Christ with everyone they can. As Christians we are called on to attend worship, support the church by giving back our tithe, volunteering and working for the mission of God. We are to be committed to the study the Word of God in Bible study, pray for each other and strangers, to care and support our neighbors in need, are we doing it? Or is all that to tough of a teaching, to tough of a ministry for us? If your truthful with yourself what is your answer?

Lets be honest about attendance. Attendance is down, whether we like to hear that or not its true. Most new pastor's when they first come get a spike in attendance for a short while. We had that last year, a bit of a bump, but now numbers are back to the steady decline that we have seen here over the last ten years or so. Is that an easy message to hear, no but it is reality. If we are honest how are we doing sharing the message and inviting friends and neighbors?

Let's be honest about finances. We don't like to talk about money, but we sure worry about it enough at committees and councils and at budgeting time. Financially we are thrilled when we look at the deficit and think we are in less of a hole then we were last year. It is still a deficit, we are still eating away at our savings, our endowment, and we know expenses will be just going higher and higher in the future. If we are honest how are we doing financially, as stewards of God?

How about the Spiritual life of the church. Can we honestly say we are having more and more Bible studies and people involved in them. No. Are we having more and more fellowship activities for our members and for those outside these four walls, No. Are we growing our small groups, Young adult, youth groups, are we building a dynamic adult Sunday school class. No. Are these things hard to hear, yes if we are truthful.

Or how about member involvement, is volunteering up with always to many people coming out to help? Summer clean-up was just last week, did we have so many people volunteering that we didn't have enough jobs for everyone? No. We had committee meetings the last week for Christian Ed., Fellowship, and this week Evangelism, council and Preschool board, will we have so many people at these meetings that we will need to use the fellowship hall, no. The truth is some of these committees are just a handful of dedicated people and that's the committees that at least meet.

The work and commitment needed to be a growing active church is hard. The work and commitment needed to be a growing as a Christian is hard. The work and commitment needed to be a faithful disciple of Christ is hard. Hard because it does take time, takes us out of our comfort zone, makes us listen and do things we might not like to hear. Are we much different then the disciples who followed Jesus that day in Capernaum, when he offered them life everlasting and yet they turned away because what he was asking was just too hard. I wonder are we any different?

Its no wonder, that part of many of the liturgies we use during the year, at the Gospel acclamation call us to say the confession of Peter's and repeat his words saying, "Lord to whom can we go, You have the words of eternal life." It is a reminder we need each week, because we are no different then those followers of Christ who found this teaching so difficult. The inner core, the twelve disciples probably found it just as hard to understand like everyone else, but they knew one thing more, they knew that the only thing they could do is to rely on Christ. After the crowds and the followers start to fade away, after Jesus says to the people I am the bread of life, you must eat of my body and drink my blood, you must consume me and live, after all of this he turns to his only few remaining faithful and asks them, do you want to leave also. And Peter speaking for the twelve like he does several times, simply says, "to whom can we go, You have the words of eternal life."

We have our faults, that is a reality. We have our problems, our stumbling blocks, the things that distract us and keep us from being fully faithful to Christ's mission, yet we also , like those twelve know that there is a hope, the promise of Christ, who is the Holy One of God. Christ who offers us eternal life, offers us his body and blood, his grace, and a relationship with God forever in the eternal kingdom.

Now we are at the end of the chapter, after five weeks we need to ask ourselves just like those people that day, who is it that we will serve? There are many distractions, worries, troubles that can make us turn away, there many things that can pull us down in misery and worry, but if we stay truthful, if we stay faithful, then we know the one who can overcome it all. To whom can we go? Let us all say, Lord, you have the words of Eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. He is the bread of Life, He is the living bread come down from heaven. He is our Savior and redeemer, overcome all things. Give thanks for our hope is everlasting. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty Lord, you come to us to bring us peace and life, you offer your own son as the bread of life, and we give you thanks. We turn to you and rely on you as our Lord and Savior, our King of Kings, the truth and life everlasting. Guide us ever in that light out of the darkness of our lives, out of the despair and hopelessness and lighten our path in righteousness and in your ways.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that descend upon us this day, to lift us up and guide us in your righteousness. Come and enter with your spirit and your peace. Transform us from worried, doubt-filled, sinful beings, into your witnesses, your apostles sent with a mission. Lift up your faith and your Word. Lord Bless us this day with your Love, grace, forgiveness and peace.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and...

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the mission of your Church. We turn to you this day for you are our God and we will serve you in all that we do. Continue to use us to become your witnesses, as your servants in this community and beyond to spread your word, to share your good news, to welcome the

stranger and lift up those torn down by hatred and sin. Lift up your face and shine upon us and send us forth as your witnesses of that glory now and forever.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.