

John 6:60-69 (Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 15—Series B)

“Are You Offended?”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

August 15, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel lesson recorded in John 6:

⁶⁰Therefore, many of His disciples, after they heard it, said, “This is a hard saying. Who is able to hear it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, knowing in Himself that his disciples were grumbling concerning this, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²What if you should see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before, what then? ⁶³The Spirit is the One who gives life, the flesh benefits nothing. The words which I am speaking to you are Spirit and are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who would not believe and who is the one who would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, “On account of this I say to you, that no one is able to come to me unless it is granted to Him from the Father.” ⁶⁶From this point on, many of His disciples went away and drew back and no longer walked with Him. ⁶⁷Therefore, Jesus said to the Twelve, “You also do not wish to go away, do you?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we believe and we know that you are the Holy One of God.”

In July, 2019, Pastor Larry Peters, a 40-year veteran pastor of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, wrote the following on his blog, “Sadly, we live in a world in which offense is a common word that is generally misunderstood. We are offended by all sorts of things today. A story a while ago found Starbucks asking police to leave their establishment because a few folks were offended by the presence of the men in blue drinking coffee (as if that were out of the ordinary!). College students routinely riot because they [are] offended when a speaker might have the nerve to disagree with them and speak on something they find objectionable (as if democracy existed only to protect what we want to hear). But in the Church this word has been used in a variety of contexts that betray what it really means. People insist that they are offended by churches that do not ordain women, promote the GLBTQ agenda, or support the global causes of the day (from climate change to gun control). They are not offended. They simply do not like what they hear. They claim offense but offense in the Scriptures means something more than hurt feelings. It means a scandal to the faith and, in particular, a scandal that threatens the faith of an individual Christian. This is not something inconsequential but profound. To be offended, then, means to have the very foundation of your faith shaken to its core.”¹

“Therefore, many of His disciples, after they heard it, said, ‘This is a hard saying. Who is able to hear it?’ But Jesus, knowing in Himself that his disciples were grumbling concerning this, said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” Jesus had many followers—that’s what “disciple” means. They followed Him as their Rabbi, their Teacher. But things changed in an instant with Jesus’ Bread of Life discourse. Jesus directed them to a Bread of more significance than the manna that the children of Israel ate for forty years in the wilderness. Jesus pointed them to a Bread better than the loaves multiplied and distributed after He had given thanks. Jesus revealed Himself to be the living Bread

¹ <https://pastoralmeanderings.blogspot.com/2019/07/offended-by-offense.html>

from heaven that gives eternal life to the world through His sacrificial death on behalf of the world. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. 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." . . . "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. . . . This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:51–58 ESV).

His disciples not only found this difficult to understand, but suspected that, if they did understand it, they would find it unacceptable. It would be, to use the Greek work, a *scandalon*, something scandalous and truly an offense, something that would indeed rock the core of their very beliefs. Jesus' words have the power to change those beliefs from death to life. The people to whom Jesus spoke in the Capernaum synagogue were all about "flesh." They were all about the literal bread Jesus had provided (so much so that they wanted to make Him king!) They were all about the manna that Moses had given. But it wasn't Moses who had given them the manna. It was God the Father. And it was God the Father who had given the true and living Bread, Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God. It's not about "flesh," the earthly bread. It's about the Spirit that gives life through the words of Jesus who is Himself the Word of God made flesh and dwelling in our midst.

Jesus invited His disciples to hear His words in faith as "Spirit" and "life." God authorized His One-of-a-Kind Son to be that "bread" that came down from heaven and gives life to all people. True life, eternal life, is to be found in Jesus alone. Not only will those who come to Christ Jesus by faith find in Him sustenance and refreshment for their souls' hunger and thirst, they will never die. Jesus promised vindication, not death but life— "never go hungry," and "never thirst" (6:35), "never cast out" (v. 37), "raise it up on the last day," "have eternal life," "raise him up on the last day" (v. 39, 40, 44), "has life eternal" (v. 47), "will live forever" (v. 51). And the way to this resurrection life is through the death of Jesus, the Bread of Life, as He gives His flesh—Himself—into the death that should have been ours.

And that just doesn't cut it for many. "From this point on, many of His disciples went away and drew back and no longer walked with Him." The apostle Paul would say it like this in his first letter to the Corinthian congregation, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block [a *scandalon*, an offense] to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:18–25 ESV).

Thus, Jesus and His death on a cross will always shake the core of human beliefs. It will always cause offense to human nature which is turned away from such a preposterous idea that a death and the shedding of blood might cover over sin and earn forgiveness and life. But it is His death on the cross, the shedding of His blood, and His resurrection to bodily life again on the third day that guarantees forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe. "Faith unites itself to Christ where he is and where he works. Were faith to seek Christ outside his work, faith would not find him and so prove itself to be a delusion. But there is no work of Christ were there is no flesh given and no blood shed. . . . There is no life apart from Him who is, precisely as the incarnate and crucified One, himself Life."²

² William C. Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 732.

This is the message that gives offense. This is the message that causes people to walk away from the Christian faith. Those disciples in Capernaum no longer regarded Jesus as their Teacher. They stopped being His disciples, returning to their previous allegiances. They turned away from fellowship with Jesus, and so turned away from fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. They rejected the life that Christ had come to give. They abandoned the new life of water and the Spirit that rocks the sinful nature to its core and begins to recreate people into the image of God as the Spirit sanctifies people in Christ Jesus for eternal life. In John 10, Jesus would promise this life again, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:10–11 ESV). The Shepherd dies, giving His flesh into death, shedding His Paschal blood on the cross, to set all people free from sin, death, and hell, and giving them new, eternal life in which they more faithfully fear, love, and trust in God and love others more than themselves.

To whom, then, will you go? Where will you find Spirit and life and not flesh and death apart from Christ? "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:53–58 ESV). Amen.