

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Psalms 34:15-22

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

08/25/1987

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said,] 56“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58This 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.” 59He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. 60When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” 61But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? 62Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. 65And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” 66Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” 68Simon

Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **The Holy One of God**

Good morning! In my opinion, one of the best shows to come out in the past decade was *Ted Lasso* on Apple TV. In case you haven’t seen it, it’s about an American college football coach who is hired by a soccer team in the UK to run their program. One of the first things that he does is post a homemade yellow sign above his door with the word “believe” written on it in blue marker or paint. The gist of the show is that while he may not know much about soccer, he’s a great coach. His skill and knowledge lies in his ability to guide people towards a better version of themselves. As the show goes along the “believe” poster becomes an icon of what he and the team are trying to achieve.

This is the fifth Sunday in a row that we’ve been dealing with what scholars call the “Bread of Life discourse,” and unlike previous years, I’ve not taken a break and preached on the first or second reading. We have been steadily working through the almost 70 verses of chapter 6 in the Gospel of John.

We started with the only miracle that shows up in all four Gospels, Jesus feeding the multitudes with just a little bread and fish. We read along as Jesus walked on water as the seas got rough, and for the last month we have been reading the lesson that Jesus offers after he comes ashore. Each

week the text has overlapped with the previous weeks, reinforcing the point that this story must be seen as a whole. So, if you feel like I'm repeating myself, it's not my fault!

But for the first time in this whole chapter, we shift from God's activity to the human response. The crowds have steadily been getting more and more angry, but for the first time we get to hear the disciples have a say. What I find funny is that Jesus doubles down on his statements. "Is this lesson too hard for you? Too bad!" It's certainly not how we were taught to deal with tough situations in seminary, but, I guess you get a pass when you're the son of God.

Now, language is always a problem. Especially when it comes to translations. What we read today is a little bland, one commentator offers a more interesting translation of the beginning of our lesson. "*60. Now, after hearing this, many of his disciples remarked, 'this sort of talk is hard to take. How can anyone pay attention to it?' 61. Jesus was quite conscious that his disciples were murmuring in protest at this. 'Does this shake your faith?' He asked them.*"<sup>1</sup> I love the brutal honesty of that translation. "*This sort of talk is hard to take,*" the disciples admit. Likewise, Jesus' response doesn't hold back. "*Does this shake your faith?*" he asks. It's an honesty I have to admire. How often do we pull back what we feel? But in this story the disciples are up front, "*this is hard to take*" they say. Jesus doesn't hold back either, "*Does this shake your faith?*" he asks.

His response might at first seem like a challenge, but I think it speaks to his very real and deep concern. God is doing something challenging, and that doesn't mean that it will be easy to get behind. And so Jesus takes stock

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John. Part 1*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966. p. 295.

of the disciples, and raises the bar. They need to know what they're getting themselves into. This won't be a walk in the park.

It's telling that it seems that so many have left. We start off chapter 6 with a huge crowd of at least 5,000 people. We move to smaller and smaller crowds until the beginning of today's text where we are left with just the disciples, and even some of them will leave before the end of the lesson, giving us just twelve. As one scholar points out, "*It is not information that makes a disciple, but a spirit-filled response to the Father made known in the word of Jesus.*"<sup>2</sup>

Which I think is the challenge for us in this lesson. For good or bad, the average church-goer usually associates themselves with the disciples. And yet, in today's lesson we witness a large portion of those "faithful" get up and leave. Where does that leave us? I mean, these disciples have been with him through some amazing events! They saw the breaking of the bread, they saw the feeding of the multitudes. They have witnessed healings and signs and even watched as Jesus literally walked on water. So if seeing all that isn't enough, what does that mean for our own little ol' faith?

I think that's the crux of the problem. We are challenged to believe in wondrous and amazing things, but that doesn't change the fact that it's still a challenge. How can we respond?

I talked about *Ted Lasso* in the beginning of my sermon, and I think it can help us here too. Without giving too much away, one of the characters in a fit of rage rips down the "believe" sign and tears it into pieces. He flees, leaves the team. But by the end of the season he returns, like the prodigal son. He had to confront his mistake, his unbelief, and he had to confess his

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<sup>2</sup> Moloney, Francis J., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1998. pp. 228-229.

mistake, but he was welcomed back. In today's Gospel Peter makes a beautiful confession we have been using in worship for 2,000 years. *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

We too have made that confession. But we must remember that even Peter will get it wrong. He will deny Jesus in the courtyard, and the rest of the disciples will hide after Jesus' death. We are all saint and sinner, and so we're going to get it wrong. But sometimes we will get it right too. The good news is that Jesus waits patiently for us to decide.

And here is where we will finish. A great scholar wrote this: *“Peter's response to Jesus is not a word of despair or a statement that they will have to settle for Jesus because there is nothing else. Peter and the others who remain have been given the gift of knowing that Jesus is the one who can give genuine life. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, the paradox remains: faith only comes as the Father draws us, and yet Peter and the others (and we too) are asked for our response. Peter and the other twelve “choose” to remain, and yet the greater and prior reality is that they have been chosen (verse 70). The mystery of faith and unbelief is not answered by supposed solutions to the paradox, but by grateful confession that the Father has indeed drawn us to faith in Jesus, and thus to eternal life.”*<sup>3</sup>

Amen and amen.

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-2/commentary-on-john-656-69-2>