

Sunday Lesson – August 22, 2021

GOSPEL: John 6: 56-69

“Too Tough to Swallow”

Context

“Jesus is teaching in the synagogue (John 6:69), where he is interpreting a passage of scripture that was introduced by the crowd in verse 31. They ask Jesus for a sign similar to the one Israel experienced in the wilderness, “as it is written, ‘he gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus goes on to interpret this verse about the manna, and he continues on the same subject through verse 58. He declares himself to be manna, the “bread of life” (6:35). Just as manna gave life in the wilderness, so also Jesus gives life.

Although the crowd was initially enthusiastic about the idea of Jesus as one like Moses who could provide this miraculous bread (John 6:34), they reject the identification of Jesus with manna. In verse 60, Jesus’ own disciples declare his teaching to be “hard,” and in verse 66 many of them turn away from him. What is it about Jesus’ teaching that they find difficult?” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-2/commentary-on-john-656-69-4)*

Insight

“As in the Exodus story, the issue is not simply the grumbling of the people but the lack of trust in God that it represents: “some of you do not believe” (John 6:64). The Greek word *pisteuo* is a common word in John that is usually translated “believe.” However, its more common meaning is to trust or rely upon someone. Although John certainly also cares what readers believe to be true about Jesus, this more primary dictionary meaning also sheds light on how this word functions in John. The difficulty in John 6 is not simply the cognitive content of believing something about Jesus, but also the lack of trust that



the disciples display. Like the Israelites, they have experienced God’s miraculous provision, but they do not trust that God will continue to provide for them in the wilderness.

To partake of Jesus as manna involves a reliance on God. One way John expresses this throughout the Gospel is through the word “abide.” The idea of “abiding” appears throughout John’s Gospel (e.g. 15:5-6). The same Greek word, *meno*, appears in John 6:56, although it is often translated “remain”: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me and I in them.” Feeding on Jesus as manna means remaining or abiding with Jesus. It is through this proximity that Jesus brings life to those who eat (v. 57).” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-2/commentary-on-john-656-69-4)*

Gospel Reading

“But Jesus didn’t give an inch. “Only insofar as you eat and drink flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, do you have life within you. The one who brings a hearty appetite to this eating and drinking has eternal life and will be fit and ready for the Final Day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. By eating my flesh and drinking my blood you enter into me and I into you. In the same way that the fully alive Father sent me here and I live because of him, so the one who makes a meal of me lives because of me. This is the Bread from heaven. Your ancestors ate bread and later died. Whoever eats this Bread will live always.” He said these things while teaching in the meeting place in Capernaum. Many among his disciples heard this and said, “This is tough teaching, too tough to swallow.” Jesus sensed that his disciples were having a hard time with this and said, “Does this rattle you completely? What would happen if you saw the Son of Man ascending to where he came from? The Spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don’t make anything happen. Every word I’ve spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this.” (Jesus knew

from the start that some weren't going to risk themselves with him. He knew also who would betray him.) He went on to say, "This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father." After this, many of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: "Do you also want to leave?" Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God." The Message

What It Could Mean?

"Before, Jesus answered criticism from the religious leaders. Now, in verse 60, the complaining comes from those who have been following him. Those who decide to leave attribute their decision to "this teaching" (verse 60b). Jesus' "feed on me" of verse 57 is, in fact, at the heart of the offense.

Because Jesus knows the secret thoughts of those around him, he is aware that his disciples are complaining about him. "Does this offend you?" (verse 61b), he asks. The question implies that, yes, **this Jesus** offends. However, the next question seems more open-ended: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" What jumps out about this question is how it reverses language by now familiar to those of us living in this chapter: "comes/came down" appears in verses 33, 38a, 41, 42, 50, 51, and 58, and "sends/sent" appears in verses 29, 38, 39, 44, and 57.

The words Jesus speaks are in unity with the life-giving spirit of the real or true bread from heaven (verse 63). Human beings are born anew not by the will of the flesh or of the will of human beings, but by the will of God (John 1:13 and 3:8).

Maybe, by all this, John means election; even so, there is a decision and "many" of Jesus' followers "turned back and no longer went about with him" (verse 66).

The Twelve remain because they have made an informed (and human) decision (verse 69). Which wins? Divine election or human decision? O'Day tells us that the message here is to stay humble: "Election is no substitute for the decision of faith." One might say the same thing about human decisions: they're no substitute for election. The drama of belief and unbelief continues to be acted out in the world of the living.

Or maybe the belief or unbelief that we claim isn't the point. Authenticity in the fellowship of believers seems to be important to John's Jesus. "What," he asks his first two disciples, "are you looking for?" (John 1:38). He asks another, who has been sick for 38 years, "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6)? And at his betrayal, twice he asks, "Whom are you looking for?" (John 18:4, 7)." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Robert Hoch*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Hebrews 3:3/Matthew 4:4](#) *The life Jesus gives lasts for eternity/Shall not live by bread alone..*
- [Matthew 5:6/John 1:12](#) *Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness/Must receive Jesus by faith*

Thought for the Day

"However strong the branch becomes, however far away it reaches round the home, out of sight of the vine, all its beauty and all its fruitfulness ever depend upon that one point of contact where it grows out of the vine. So be it with us too." ~ *Andrew Murray*

A Prayer

"Dear heavenly Father, I pray today to abide in You. I want to think clearly, act wisely, and speak kindly. I strive to have my actions reflect your glory. I ask you to abide in me and always be with me. Comfort me, strengthen me, and fill me with wisdom. In Jesus' name I pray." **Amen.** (*Based on John 15:4 – DailyPrayerGuide.net*)