

**2024-08-25 14<sup>th</sup> Sun after Pentecost John 6:56-69 SERMON**

**By The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt**

My sisters and brothers, today we come to the end of our journey in John Chapter 6. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

In the beginning the crowd murmured and now, we are told, “many of his disciples” are now questioning things. A distinction is made between the disciples and the larger group of disciples – the crowd. Jesus says even among the Twelve there are those who do not believe!

Throughout this Bread of Heaven discourse Jesus has been verbally entangling the flesh and the eternal yet keeping them distinct. It is the Spirit, Jesus says, the Spirit gives life where the flesh is useless. When we die, our earthly shell is all that is left as our spirit goes to sleep with Jesus. That earthly shell we see in the casket is only that, our loved one’s spirit is what made them the person we love. The Spirit gives life where the flesh is useless.

Our text also told us of Jesus slipping away from the crowd after the feeding miracle because they wanted to make him their king. They continued to pursue him because they had had their bellies filled. Now, they have tired of the lectures on Bread from Heaven and this talk of - eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This has thinned the multitude considerably.

Like those in the crowd, we want to believe in something that will make a difference in our physical existence and so we, like the crowd return to the manna in the wilderness. The Israelites did not give God credit for providing for their physical needs, they gave that credit to Moses - a human like them. They were short-sighted and lost out on the connection to the full spiritual truth of God-as-provider. Instant gratification does not build resilience nor strong faith.

The flesh fools us into thinking we have true life but it disconnects us from God's very self - His Son, the Christ. Instead, we head toward those things devoid of the Spirit's life-

giving power and the evil one uses them to convince us they are all we need.

The Father has given us faith that turns us to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Faith tells us what flesh has to offer is not the full story. Faith causes us to seek deep and wide spiritual truths that give us life in Christ. Like Peter, we muse, *"Lord to whom shall we go?"*

We might understand Peter's words as *"Lord, no alternatives are as good. You are all we have."*

*"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* is a faith question. Our sinful flesh is no help for our eternal welfare. Our sinfulness is in a constant conflict with God's sinlessness. Righteousness. Holiness. We think, "Oh, we are not so bad. But we are not as bad as some other worse sinners."

Children of God, we are all sinners. We are guilty of breaking God's commandments. We are unrighteous. Our flesh cannot

save us. Our flesh will not search for God. "*Lord to whom shall we go?*"

Our sinful flesh is powerless to help or save us. Jesus is very clear: "The Spirit gives life – spirit life."

Jesus wanted the crowd, the disciples, and us to believe the truth. So, He reminds us - flesh is nothing and only the Father empowers our faith.

It was and is difficult to hear. Many of the crowd left - and no longer followed Jesus. He asked the Twelve, "*Do you want to leave also?*" which led to Peter's confession question: "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*"

It is a theological question that only a believer would ask - a question of conviction. "*You have the words of eternal life.*"

A simple answer that holds a powerful truth – a truth that divides and many left. But some remained on the side of Truth - Jesus.

My sisters and brothers, theologian Karoline Lewis writes: "We betray Jesus when we think that real, abundant life in the eternal could never be ours. It is easy to imagine God loves the world, but when it comes down to you, personally, you think you are not really worthy of God's love. You cannot imagine how God could love someone like you, and you are not sure you want to trust in a relationship that just might turn out to be figment of your own imagination.

Because at the end of the day, life, real life, life lived, abundant life, is hard to fathom, hard to accept, hard to imagine that it could be yours.

You are unable to accept that abundant life could be true, you are reluctant to imagine, to dream, to picture when God says God loves the world that He actually means you. Maybe that kind of life is for someone else, but not for you. Yet, Jesus says, "That's not the way it is."

*"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."*

The Good News - Lord Jesus, we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.