



Which Disciple Are You? – TouchPoint for August 18, 2021

John 6:56-71 (NRSV) “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This 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.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But 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. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Grace and peace from the mystery in who we live and move and have our being

This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?

Jesus has been referring to himself as the bread of life. Jesus has been speaking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Finally, the disciples say to him what we have all been thinking, “*This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?*”

Now I hate to do a little word study with you, but this is after all the gospel of John, which even in English needs a translation. John's gospel isn't just a dialogue with us, it is a dialogue within the gospel itself. Breaking John's gospel down to little bite size pieces isn't always the best way to go about it; you sometimes have to go back to another part of the gospel.

For example, this statement: “This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?” Literally reads... “This word is hard; who is able to hear it?” And in John's gospel, that is a *big* difference. Because the word 'word' has special meaning in John. It is the “Word (that has) become flesh and dwelt among us.”

This is the scandal of John's gospel. This is the scandal of the Divine. This is the scandal of the Mystery... that the Divine Mystery has taken on flesh and dwells among us.

And so when Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is simply reiterating what John wrote at the beginning of his gospel. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

If we're going to encounter the Divine – if we're going to encounter the Mystery – it is going to be here on earth, where we dwell, doing such basic earthly things as eating and drinking.

You know, I was really hoping for a more glamorous God. A little more pomp and circumstance please.

I mean, Jesus appears to give us a little hope when he talks a couple moments later of watching the son of man ascending to where he was before except, well...when John's gospel talks about the son of man ascending, he is referring to the cross, to the crucifixion...to Jesus being lifted up on Golgotha.

No wonder the disciples say, "This is a tough word to hear."

The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood.

This is not the spirituality I was looking for. Because, you see, if the word has become flesh, and if the bread of life is found in eating and drinking, then that means the word is all around me. The bread of life is all around me. It is found in the physical... it is found in the flesh.

Yes, I know that Jesus says in this passage, "The flesh is useless," but if we take that to mean a hatred for the physical world, then we have to negate John's words in previous chapters of the "Word becoming **flesh**" and "for God so loved **the world**." The 'flesh' is where the Spirit resides. The 'flesh' is where the Spirit gives life. There is a deeper reality to flesh, which shouldn't lead us to reject the flesh, but lead us to a greater reverence... all the while recognizing it is not the be all and end all.

And that is my problem. That is what makes this word so hard to hear. I personally would like a spirituality that doesn't take the flesh so seriously.

This is not the spirituality I was looking for. Because, if the Word has become flesh, and if the bread of life is found in eating and drinking, then that means the Word is all around me. The bread of life is all around me. It is found in the physical, it is found in the flesh. Why, it might even be found in you. And me!

FOUND IN YOU?!

Personally, I would like a spirituality that teaches me to tolerate the flesh, tolerate you. That I can do, some of the time, but don't push me. OK? But to speak of the Word becoming flesh, to speak of life as being experienced in eating and drinking, well that places me with you – next to you – and makes me a part of you. You are not someone or something to be tolerated, but someone in whom the Spirit resides and can give life to me.

FOUND IN ME?!

My mom was fond of saying when I was in my 30's and doing something she didn't approve of, "And you're a pastor!!" Now let's be clear. It wasn't said out of respect and honor, it was said out of disbelief and disapproval. And I would reply, "Yes, Mom. And the Word has become flesh and is dwelling amongst you. In me!" I don't think she found much comfort in that. That was more than a little difficult for her to believe.

Kind of like the disciples in this passage. Some don't believe and walk away. Some affirm. And some, like Judas, betray.

I was reading a commentary about this passage and it asked the question, "Which kind of disciple are you?" Are you the one who walks away? Are you the one who declares Jesus as the Holy One of God? Or are you the one who betrays Jesus?

WHICH KIND OF DISCIPLE ARE YOU?

And you know what my answer is... “Yes.”

“Yes.” I am all of them. Sometimes I walk away from the Christ, and the flesh and blood the Christ inhabits. “Lord, when did I see you hungry, or thirsty, or in prison?” Sometimes I declare as well, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” because this is where I experience life at its deepest level. And sometimes I betray it all like Judas.

I am Peter *and* Judas, I am James *and* John. I am Thomas, and if I could remember the rest of their names I would mention them, too, but I can't. I am Peter and Judas, I am James and John. I am Thomas...

And yet... I continue to get fed. Even in the midst of my grumbling and complaining, my doubts and fears, my denials and betrayals, and even in the occasional affirmative declaration.

Which is where this whole discussion started in the first place in this chapter. The Jews talked about how God fed them manna from heaven in the wilderness wandering, which by the way, they constantly complained about. And yet God continued to feed them.

And then Jesus said he was the new “Bread of Life... come down from heaven...” which they then all complained about as well.

I'm sensing a pattern here...complaining... and... Actually I'm sensing 2 patterns here. We complain, God continues to feed.

WHICH KIND OF DISCIPLE AM I?

I am all of them. Sometimes I walk away from the Christ, and the flesh and blood the Christ inhabits. “Lord, when did I see you hungry, or thirsty, or in prison?” Sometimes I declare as well, “Lord, to whom shall we go? This is where I experience life at its deepest level.” And sometimes I betray it all.

I am Peter *and* Judas, I am James *and* John. I am Thomas.

And yet... I continue to get fed. Even in the midst of my grumbling and complaining, my doubts and fears, my denials and betrayals, and even in the occasional affirmative declaration. I continue to get fed, in my flesh and blood by the One who inhabits flesh and blood.

In the night in which he was betrayed... denied... walked away from...

Jesus took bread and wine and declared his life to be for all. That this is where he would continue to ABIDE... continue to DWELL.

IN THE FLESH... In the flesh of Peter and Judas and Thomas and all the rest. And in this meal and in this place. The Christ continues to ABIDE and DWELL... in bread and wine, making the world the bread of life for us, and in you and me, making us the bread of life for the world.

Amen.



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Creator Spirit, Come

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.

Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.

Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.