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John 6:25-71
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You Do Not Want to Leave Too, Do You?

I love a good steak! My apologies for our vegetarian and vegan friends, but I confess that I do. Do we have any other self avowed carnivores in the room? If so, how do you like your steak? Let's take a poll.

Raise your hand if you like your steak well done. I mean there is no pink in it at all.

Raise your hand if you like your steak medium well with a little pink.

Raise your hand if you like your steak medium rare with a lot pink.

Raise your hand if you like your steak rare, tartar as they say in France, where it is practically mooing on your plate.

Raise your hand if you'd prefer we didn't talk about eating meat?

I'm definitely in the medium rare camp, cooked with still a little life blood flowing through it. Mmmm!

This conversation wouldn't even be happening in Jesus' day because the Old Testament prohibited eating meat that still had blood in it. Ewww!

In The Book of Leviticus, God states, "Any Israelite or alien living among them who eats any blood - I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may any alien living among you may eat blood.'

Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is in its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.'¹

This teaching would have been ingrained in everyone's mind as people listened to Jesus.

To set the stage for today's question, Jesus had just fed five thousand men, not including the women and children with just five small barley loaves and two small fish and afterwards he walked on water to a boat where the disciples were crossing over the sea to the other side. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they also got into boats and crossed over the sea to look for them. That's where we pick up the story today.

¹Leviticus 17:11-14

Please join me as we read from John 6:25-71. It's a long passage, so bear with me, but is important to get the full grasp of Jesus' question for us today.

25 When the crowds found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

30 So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? **31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **36** But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. **37** All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. **38** For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. **40** For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

41 At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." **42** They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. **44** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. **45** It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. **46** No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. **47** Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. **48** I am the bread of

life. **49** Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. **50** But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. **51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

53 Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. **55** For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. **56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. **57** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” **59** He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? **62** Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! **63** The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. **64** Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. **65** He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

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

70 Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” **71** (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

Interesting story, considering that today is also the day when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, where shortly we will feast off Jesus’ body and blood. This morning, I aim to do several things. First we will quickly examine different views of the Lord’s Supper held by various Christian denominations. Then we will ascertain what exactly Jesus meant here. After that, we will move into what do we

Presbyterians believe? And finally we will ask what teachings of Jesus would cause us to say, “Nope, I’m out of here?”

I remember serving as an altar boy in the Roman Catholic Church when I was about 10 or 12 years old. There was point in the mass just before communion when the priest would say some special words about the mystery of our faith. I would ring a hand bell. And then, voila...the wafer and the wine... mysteriously and miraculously became the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. The big theological word describing what took place in that moment was transubstantiation. The substance of our communion elements changed into Jesus’ actual body and blood.

Roman Catholics take this sacrament and the transformation very seriously. Once changed, the elements must be completely consumed by the communicants or the priest. That is why afterwards the priest eats the rest of what is left over... even the crumbs collected...and the wine left over in the chalice. Or have you ever noticed how servers used to have a plate to place under your chin to make sure that nothing ever fell on the ground. That would be sacrilegious.

Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest, during the 15th and 16th centuries, thought that was taking it a little too far. Instead, Luther and his followers known as Lutherans, would say that the elements don’t actually become the physical body and blood of Christ, but that Jesus is very present during the act of communion, being “truly and substantially present in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine.”²

John Calvin, the Father of the Presbyterian Church, further refined Luther’s understanding. Calvin would say, and what we say around here, is that Jesus is spiritually present in the sacrament and the food he offers is spiritual food. The bread and the wine are simply physical signs pointing to a spiritual reality. In the same what the these Exit signs point to the way out of the sanctuary.

Calvin said, “Thus, when bread is given as a symbol of Christ’s body, we must at once grasp this comparison: as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so Christ’s body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul. When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect on the benefits which wine imparts to the body, and so realize that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ’s blood. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden.”³

Think of it this way. In the sacrament of baptism, the outwards actions of washing the body are physical signs pointing to the spiritual action of cleansing us

² <https://zionhc.org/lutheran-beliefs-about-holy-communion/>

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Volume 2, Chapter XVII.3, Edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1363.

from sin within. It doesn't actually physically clean us. It just points to what is spiritually going on inside. Also according to Calvin, this invisible spiritual food is a "mystery felt rather than explained." It just is.⁴

A fourth and very common understanding of the Lord's Supper is that of remembrance. This view is held by those who take at face value Jesus' words of institution at the Last Supper in Luke 22, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper is nothing more than a remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice done our behalf. But there is no spiritual nourishment going on.

So which is it? That it is Jesus' actual body and blood? That Jesus is mysteriously in, with, and under the elements? That Jesus spiritual feeds and nourishes us as mystery of our faith? Or a remembrance of his sacrifice?

I think our text today provides us with a clue that he was talking about something other than physical food. Look at verse 27 when Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Then again in verse 63 when Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh count for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

Clearly Jesus was talking metaphorically and not actually.

Just as when Jesus metaphorically described himself as the Good Shepherd, he wasn't talking about leading sheep. He was talking about leading people.⁵

Just as when Jesus metaphorically described himself as the Light of the World, he wasn't talking about the kind of physical light we see.⁶ He was alluding to a light that shined from within.

Just as when Jesus metaphorically described himself as The Way, he wasn't saying he was a road that we walk on. He was inviting us on a journey with him.⁷

Just as when Jesus metaphorically described himself as The Gate in the sheep pen, he wasn't saying that he was a physical wooden gate with metal hinges. He was talking about being a conduit through which people could come to God.⁸

Each of these metaphorical references come from the Gospel of John as does our scripture today. Jesus was talking metaphorically here, as he often did. Not actually. Get my drift?

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Volume 2, Chapter XVII.3, Edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1363.

⁵ John 10:11-18

⁶ John 8:12

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ John 10:9

But many of his disciples took him at face value, said, [Um, eat your flesh? Drink your blood?] “This hard teaching. Who can accept it?” [Thanks, but no thanks.] They turned away from following him any further and so missed out on the blessing of what Jesus was really saying beneath the surface of his words.

Till all that was left, was the original twelve disciples.

So Jesus asked them, “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

Remember whenever Jesus asked a question it was never that he didn’t know the answer. He asked to see if his hearers knew the answer to the question themselves.

This got me thinking...

What would Jesus have to ask us to do that would cause us to turn away from following him?

What would we have to stop doing that it would be literally impossible for us to keep following?

Who or what would we need to leave behind in our journey with him, that might cause us to say “Thanks, but no thanks?”

What part of our religious beliefs, even those we grew up with, would we need to shed, that would cause just to say, “No way?”

This is hard teaching my friends. But Jesus’ way is not the easy way.

You see the world wants to conform us into its image. That is the easy way, the wide way.

Jesus wants to transform us into his image. That is difficult way, the narrow way.

Jesus’ teaching forced his disciples to choose either follow the Old Testament Torah in its entirety, or follow Jesus’ way of love and grace instead. To leave behind this old teaching about not eating the blood of a creature and to embrace something entirely new of consuming Jesus’ body and blood, metaphorically. Jesus said, “People will know that you are my disciples not by the way your condemn others, but by the way you love each other.”⁹

It was radical. Not everyone could do it.

Could I? Could you?

German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of my favorite voices of all time. Bonhoeffer went to his execution convinced that the German Christian Church had been coopted by Adolf Hitler and the far right extremist Nazi movement of his day. You see it’s extremely dangerous when the Church joins hands with those on the political extremes. The same could be said of what’s taking place in our country today. Bonhoeffer was brave enough to stand up and say this isn’t right!

⁹John 13:35

In Bonhoeffer's famous book called *Discipleship*, he said and I paraphrase, [We've made it too easy to follow Jesus today. The church has bought into cheap grace. But grace isn't cheap. It cost Jesus everything. And when Jesus calls us to follow him, he calls us to die.] Maybe not physically, but metaphorically to ourselves and the world's way around us.

This is hard teaching. Can we accept it?

One of the ways we are transformed into the image of Christ is by eating this bread and drinking this cup. When we do so, we spiritually take in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit takes over to change us from within. We become more like Jesus, which means we become more like God. As Calvin explained, "it is a mystery felt, rather than explained." It just is.

Let us pray.