

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2015
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

John 6:60-69

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 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. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (NIV)

Why would you leave a church and say I no longer want to be a part of this congregation? It could be for a good reason (such as this church is no longer faithful to God's Word) or it could be for a not so good reason (such as the pastor just doesn't have much hair left on his head.) What would make you get out and get away from your spouse or your childhood home? In the same way you could leave for the right reason or for the wrong reason. Why would you quit your job? What could happen that would cause you to stop hanging around a certain group of people or a once close friend? Again, there could be many reasons why, and some might be wise and others unwise.

Dear friends in Christ, in all three of our lessons today we see the most important relationship at stake – a relationship with God. Will people leave or stay? Joshua wanted to know why the people of Israel would ever want to leave the one true God and serve anyone else. As he beautifully and boldly confessed: ***"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*** Moses could have left his faith behind and enjoyed the pleasures and riches of Egypt, but he saw having Christ (even if it meant suffering with God's people) to be of greater value so he left Egypt. Now here in our Gospel we see many people who have Jesus right there in front of them. Why would they leave? What would cause them to say I know longer want to follow Him? And I want you to stand there with them to listen to Jesus speak. As you do I pray the Holy Spirit leads you to come to terms with the right answer when Jesus asks: ***"You do not want to leave too, do you?"***

For some reason these words just pull on my heart: ***"You do not want to leave too, do you?"*** As I picture a crowd of people walking away from Jesus I wonder what the look was in our Savior's eyes as He turns to His 12 disciples and asks ***"You do not want to leave (me) too, do you?"*** Before we get to their answer let's go back and remember the context. From the time Jesus miraculously fed all those thousands Jesus had many people following Him. Jesus used this time to teach some vital truths in what is referred to as His bread of life discourse. He told them such important truths such as: ***"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty...I am the bread of life that came down from heaven...If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world...Whoever eats my flesh and***

drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Many people started to follow Jesus because they wanted a bread king, but now Jesus kept talking about Himself as the bread of life. Many wanted more miracles but Jesus kept pointing their eyes to Him as manna that came down from heaven. Many people were concerned about physical and earthly things and Jesus keeps teaching them about spiritual and heavenly things. Many had their hearts set on food and Jesus is more concerned about faith. Finally, many of the people following Jesus had enough of Jesus' words. ***“On hearing it, many of the disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?....From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”*** Because Jesus was not doing the things they wanted Him to do, and Jesus was not saying the things they wanted Him to say, they leave. They no longer follow Jesus.

I find it interesting that John uses the same the Greek word “logos” which is translated here as *teaching* that John used for Jesus in chapter one where Jesus is call the “logos” or *Word*. Is that not my friends how intimately Jesus is tied to His Word! If they reject His Word, they are rejecting Jesus. When they walk away from His Word, they walk away from Jesus. Any time we reject His Word, we are rejecting Jesus.

Don't let us think for a moment that we don't have the same sinful flesh that these followers did who leave Jesus! What do we think about some of the Bible's hard teachings? What do we do when we come across words of Scripture that we don't necessary care for or that don't fall in line with our reason or earthly beliefs? Don't think for a moment that the devil has not tricked us like he has this crowd to be more concerned about food for our bodies than about food for our souls! Don't think for a moment that you and I have never crossed over the line of not only living in this world but of being of the world! The world as we know has little concern or tolerance for the words of Christ. So Jesus at times needs to say to us: ***“Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”***

In other words Jesus is reaching out in love pleading: *“don't leave!”* I have the words you need to hear. The Holy Spirit wants to give you life. Perhaps at this point you are thinking *“but Pastor I'm not going to leave Jesus. That's why I'm here at church. I love Jesus and will always follow Him.”* I wonder if this isn't why we have this one verse here in this text where Jesus talks about the one who will betray him. If we don't think someone close to Jesus could ever fall away we need to look no further than the 12 disciples closest to Him. Judas threw it all away and for what – 30 pieces of silver? The warning for us is clear: ***“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”*** (1 Corinthians 10)

So there is real concern when Jesus looks at the Twelve still by His side, when Jesus looks at us, and asks: ***“You do not want to leave too, do you?”*** Now we come to the answer only the Holy Spirit is able to work in a heart and a confession that only the Father in heaven can enable one to speak. For all the times Peter spoke too quickly and said the wrong thing – this time he absolutely hits the nail on the head. ***Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”***

It is my fervent prayer today that you and I have been led to give the same answer. Where else can we go to find words for eternal life? Where else could we place our faith other than in Jesus - the Holy One of God? For Jesus has given you and I a passport that

tells us who we really are, and it reads “*a redeemed child of God heading for heaven.*” For Jesus accepted all the hard words of God – including becoming fully human for us and living under the law for us. While people were leaving Jesus and walking away, Jesus kept walking toward the cross for all people. While many people, including us, too often set our hearts on bread for our bellies and look for the easy path of comfort and pleasure, Jesus took the most difficult path on which He gave up His body to be the bread of life for our souls. Jesus died to pay for all our sins and then rose again to make sure you and I have eternal life.

This is why our passport now reads - “*a redeemed child of God heading for heaven.*” So when our flesh rebels against God’s Word and the devil keeps whispering lies into our ears and the world tries to allure us in with all its charms we can just hold up our passport and say thanks but no thanks. Your passport tells you Jesus has made you God’s child so why would you listen to the words of anyone else. Your passport tells you that you have life and forgiveness and a real purpose for living which is more than all the money of the world could buy. That is why Moses chose not to live in a palace and enjoy the riches of the most powerful nation around – Moses was looking ahead to far greater treasures in heaven. This is why for Joshua there was not really a choice at all when he said: “***But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.***” This is why we understand there will never, ever be a good reason to leave Jesus! When Jesus, who lived and died and rose again for us looks at us with His loving eyes and asks, “***You do not want to leave too, do you?***” we have the answer: “***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.***” Amen.