

1. Information for the Reader

This is a Sermon to be preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church on August 14, 1994. The length should be 20 minutes. This Sermon will also be performed for a preaching practicum at Fuller Theological Seminary and presented in class on August 9th.

Scripture: John 6:50-69
(following the Presbyterian Lectionary which lists only 51-58)

Title: Cannibalism in John 6

Theme: Commitment to Christ

Purpose: To show the need for faithfulness to Christ despite things that offend us.

2. What is said

I would like talk today about a very familiar passage from the Gospel of John Chapter 6. It would be good if you could take one of those Bibles that are on the seats and turn with me to Chapter 6. I will read some verses and then talk about them.

In John Chapter 6 Jesus is teaching in a Synagogue -- a kind of Church - and is talking to his fellow Jews. In John Chapter 6:50 he says.

2.1. *Cannibalism*

50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

<PAUSE>!

Have you ever thought about what Jesus is saying here? He is saying effectively: Eat me! I am food! The literal meaning of the words here suggest - well it not only suggests - that you should get him and eat him. This is eating human flesh. Cannibalism! What a scandal!

It was forbidden for the Jews to eat human flesh and totally contrary to everything they knew. Human Life was sacred for the Jews as it is for us today. How can Jesus speak like that?

Human sacrifice? Is that not something that the pagans in Africa do when they cook the missionaries in their great big kettle?

What did the Jews, that heard him, speak and think of him?

What kind of madness is this? Only someone out of his mind would tell us to eat him alive. This guy is probably dangerous. How can he be living bread?

As we see in verse 52 they finally settled the issue by thinking that they had not understood him correctly.

So they asked him "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53 So 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 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;
55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

Here the Jews must have gotten completely mad at Jesus. He confirms and makes what he says even stronger by using some special words to affirm the truthfulness of what he says.

Look at verse 53. If you have the NRSV you have “Very truly” at the beginning of Jesus’ words. This is in the original Greek: Amen, amen, a special term used by Jesus to stress the truthfulness and reliability of the words he speaks.

Then look at verse 54. That “eat” is not a harmless “eat” but the Greek word uses a rather vulgar word that means very clearly chewing.

Then verse 55 which again affirms that his flesh is food and his blood is drink.

There is a promise connected with Cannibalism. The one who eats will be raised on the last day and will have eternal life. Cannibalism is a blessing and necessary to gain eternal life. If we do abstain then we will have no life at all. Those who do not eat are already dead. Eternal life is connected with the life of Jesus.

2.2. Eat and have Eternal Life

56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your anc[estors] ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

Jesus here affirms his deep connection with God. Life of God will be mediated through him into the life of anyone eating and drinking. Jesus is the special messenger of God sent for giving us real life, the eternal life.

This claim to be sent by God did sit not very well with the Jews of that time. Jesus says in effect that he is the only way to God. Thereby he denies that the laws which the Jews followed to be blessed by God were of any value.

Jesus produces a connection between the Mannah that the Jews ate in the desert when they came out of Egypt and the food that he is. The Mannah in the desert was only good for some time, but the food that Jesus is, is good for all time. Eternal life is bound up with it.

No one has access to the Father, to God, unless by Jesus Christ. No Muslim, No Hindu, No Jew, not even a Christian who just formally attends Church. The only way to the Father is through eating and drinking Jesus' blood and body.

He is the one with a special blessing. Jesus is exclusive! No one comes to God except through him.

2.3. Rejected by Disciples

59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

Note here that many of his disciples heard this and began wondering over their teacher. This intolerant exclusivism and the strange talk about Cannibalism could not be tolerated. They began talking among themselves over what Jesus had said and it was very offensive to them. They did not want to accept this strange teaching.

Here we are talking just about Jesus' disciples not the regular Jews. The regular Jews are long gone at this point. Jesus' teaching was chasing away all who would be interested in him. Only the constant followers of Jesus were left.

Jesus words about the flesh that we should eat and the blood that we shall drink are indeed very difficult to understand because they make only sense with knowledge of the death of Jesus on the cross. The disciples did not have a chance to understand what he was talking about!

Jesus' death occurred later, - naturally -, here he is still talking to his disciples.

All that has happened till now must be very offensive to anyone with a sober mind! No wonder that many of the disciples began rejecting Jesus' teaching.

61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?"

62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

64 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.

65 And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

Jesus' is aware of his disciples complaining about him behind his back and he confronts them openly and talks with them about the things that offend them. He does not hide anything, he is absolutely open and honest with them. There is a contrast between Jesus' openness and the disciples dispute among themselves without taking up the issue with Jesus himself. The Greek for complaining here is Skandalizein. They were scandalized by what Jesus had said and what claims he had made.

Instead of retracting his sayings he adds something (V62) to provoke them even further. In V62 Jesus emphasizes his special position even more by saying that he would ascend into heaven! Jesus' effectively gives them the choice: Either you believe me fully in all that I say or I can even produce more things that will offend you even more!

Verse 64 then tells us the reason that Jesus does provoke them. He wants only completely dedicated disciples not some that make compromises and do not fully trust him.

The result is that disciples leave him in large quantity and Jesus is not so popular as he was before. He seems to have wanted it like that (V64-65). It looks as if Jesus has brought this whole thing up intentionally to test the faith of his disciples.

He leaves his disciples complete freedom. No convincing words to make them stay. No concessions. Instead he brings his message even more to the

point. Most of the disciples choose to no longer to follow him. They cannot believe this claim that Jesus' makes to be the only source of life, the only mediator to God and the wild things that he says about his flesh and blood.

2.4. *But some are faithful despite everything*

But some of his disciples are left and so Verse 67 follows:

67 So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

Does "the twelve" indicate that they were the only ones left? There must have been a radical reduction in the numbers of the followers of Jesus. But still the twelve too had to make a decision and that is what the question of Jesus is about here. From the Greek we can see that Jesus hopes that they will not leave him, because the question expects a negative answer. Jesus' hopes that they will stay with him, but he has this respect for their own decision. No convincing no persuasion is attempted.

Then Peter speaks for the group:

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

One can almost hear the despair of the disciples "Where can we go?". What Jesus did does not suit Peter. He hates the stuff that has come up and he also does not understand what is going on. What crazy thing is taking of here? But he and the other eleven do not go away. Why?

<Pause>

Peter believes in Jesus and he trusts him even beyond his reason and understanding. He has understood a little bit -- about Jesus giving eternal life and he has seen Jesus' special relationship with God. He knows Christ and therefore he trusts that what Jesus says is true despite his inability to understand and despite the offensive and hurtful words that Jesus has said. Peters faith is build on his relationship with Christ and not on what his mind tells him. His faith is there and he knows that only Jesus gives life. Where else can he go when Jesus, only Jesus, is the real life giver? Therefore "Lord, to whom can we go?" which is both a sign of despair and faith.

What has happened must have made a big impression on all of the disciples. They did not understand but they kept it in their minds and thought about the

strange sayings frequently until it made sense possibly a long time after Jesus Christ had died on the cross and had risen again. This whole issue taught the disciples a lot so that it was written down for generations to come so that we can understand too.

2.5. *Witness: Problems with Christianity*

There have been phases in my life when I did not like what was happening or I did not understand what was going on. In these times I have often thought about Peter, faced with this offense but still clinging to Christ. I have often wished in the past that God would have made life easier for me. In these times I can identify with Peter.

One of those phases happened shortly after I became a Christian when I was around 20. At that time I had been very much interested in Science and had majored in Maths and Physics. Being a Christian was a problem because it was against many things I had been taught in my schooling. A God that intervened in my life just did not fit into the way of thinking I had learned.

But there was the experience of Christ working in my life and Christ working in other peoples lives that I could not deny. It was very confusing for me. I was used to learn to control everything by knowledge and so I was very eager to get to know everything about Christianity to finally figure out how God works.

But I found out that it was impossible for me to grasp even the basics of Christianity with my mind. I remember vividly all my attempts to make the doctrine of the Trinity logical or to come up with some other explanation for the things we know about God. But I ended up again and again with three and one. And three is not equal to one ! This was a deep insult to my logical mind. God was elusive and would not let himself be subjected to my mind! I was upset but as Peter I had no other way to go. I knew the life I had been leading before I was a Christian and the life I had after I became a Christian. There was no question that I would not go back. So what?

2.6. *God is greater*

We have to acknowledge that God is greater, greater than all our ability to reason. God has a higher logic than we do. Our reduced capabilities of reasoning mean that God cannot be understood or expressed in this world

with the logic that we have. Attempts to talk about God result in seeming contradictions like the Trinity.

This also taught me quite a bit about myself. My need to control everything through rules that I know. Science is a way of controlling the world. God is not controllable. We either can trust God or trust the world.

Calvin: *Faith goes beyond the capabilities of our minds.*

We need to be committed to Jesus Christ and follow him. That does not mean that our reason has no role to play. I have learned a lot for example about Science as a result of being a Christian, and -- upon looking for greater detail -- generally found that Science rather confirms Christianity than rejects it.

There is a Scripture verse that beautifully illustrates it in *Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.*

The respect for God and for what he says to us is the beginning of wisdom and the basis of knowledge. We have to acknowledge that God is far greater than we. Who are we to judge him? We can just learn from him. And if it offends us, if it is not what we expect then we have to humbly wait until we learn why this is that way and he shows us the reason why.

2.7. God corrects us

Trust in God and a full commitment to God is necessary if God shall be able to change our lives. Changing our lives means that God has to confront us with some unpleasant things about ourselves and about the world. Otherwise we will not make any progress. If we run away whenever God shows us something or corrects us or offends us then we will never learn.

We are the children of God who is our Father. That means also that we are learning from God. Jesus is our great model here. Childhood usually means accepting authority, being disciplined and waiting until certain things can be understood and until you can be trusted to do these advanced things. That is the same with faith. When you were a child you had no choice but to follow the education of your parents. Now as an adult God has given you the ability to opt out of it. You can just say no and walk away like the other disciples.

But progress in faith can only be made with a full commitment to him. God is looking for those like Peter that let themselves be made ready for the Kingdom of God. God encourages us in *Luke 13:24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door ; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able"*

2.8. The Promise

For all those that follow Christ in following his footsteps God has beautiful promises. The first Psalm is a characteristic expression of these promises: *Psalm 1:1 Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; 2 but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. 3 They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.*

The Law of the Lord is the Scripture that was available in that time for the writer. We should daily think about God and about what he says to us through Scripture and through other means.

We are not those who reject Scripture. We cannot reject Scripture or what Scripture says in parts or as a whole as primitive or under some other reason even if it is so unpleasant and offensive, because Scripture is the only reliable source the only way how Christ can come alive for us again. If we are committed to Christ then we are also committed to Scripture!

Then we will be like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in God's appointed season.

2.9. Commitment to Christ

But be aware:

There is no commitment to Christ without the willingness to face offenses.

There is no progress in the Christian faith without facing issues that we do not like.

There is no speaking of God in our lives without being ready to hear however difficult it may be

All depends on your trust in Christ. Do you trust him and love him, with all your life, with all your heart, with all your mind? When it makes you unpopular? When God or his word is offending you?

2.10. Means to be a Cannibal

If you trust and believe Jesus then you will do that what we talked about when I began speaking.

Then you will eat his flesh by consuming all that he says to you in Scripture, all that he says to you through his Spirit and through your fellow Christians. And you will daily chew on it by thinking God's thoughts so that they become yours.

Then you will drink his blood by claiming it for the forgiveness of your sin, for the cleansing of your soul, and for the joy of the life in Jesus Christ.

To be short:

Cannibalize Jesus and you will have everlasting life!

Amen

3. Order of the Service

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 14, 1994

Liturgist: Dana Wilhelm

3.1. Preparation for Worship

How lovely on the mountains by Leonard E. Smith taught by
Organist of the Church

3.2. The People Assemble in God's Name

3.2.1. Welcome and Announcements

Liturgist

3.2.2. Call to Worship

Liturgist: Now to the One

who by the power at work within us
is able to do far more abundantly
than all we ask or think,
to God be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus,
to all generations for ever and ever
Amen.

Announcing of Hymn

3.2.3. *Hymn #260 "A Mighty Fortress"

3.2.4. Prayer of Confession

Liturgist: Holy Father,

we confess that we have failed to love you
with all our heart, soul, and mind.
We have ignored your commandments
and have strayed from your ways.

<Pause>

In your mercy,

People: **Hear our prayer**

Liturgist: Lord Jesus Christ,

we confess that we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We fail to reach out to people in need,
and have not told your story to all the world.

<Pause>

In your mercy,

People: **Hear our prayer**

Liturgist: Holy Spirit,

we confess that we are slow to follow your leading.

We prefer to do things our own way,
and ignore your presence in our lives.

<Pause>

In your mercy,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Liturgist: Blessed Trinity,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
have mercy upon us.

Forgive our sin, and raise us to new life

3.2.5. Time of Personal Silent Confession

3.2.6. Assurance of Pardon

Liturgist: Hear the good news! The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin and be alive to all that is good. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

People: Glory to God. Amen

3.2.7. *Gloria Patri #579 “Glory be to the Father”

3.3. The Proclamation of God’s Word

3.3.1. Solo Bill Grainger Sr.

3.3.2. In the Children’s Story (First action of minister)

Could all the kids come up front to the Children’s story please.

Do you still remember what Dr. Swanson taught you last week?

What did he teach you? [Hallelujah]

And do you still remember what it meant? [Praise the Lord!, Command]

Would you please say it again:

Louder please..... [*Have them shout*]

Allright. Very good!

There is another word that we use more often than Hallelujah. which word is this?

[*Amen, if they do not guess it: It is said after each prayer*]

Can you say it now? Each one of you at 5 times! Amen, Amen [Shout again]

Do you know what it means?

Amen is a Hebrew word and it means true, reliable, faithful. You can count on it!

Jesus used this word very often. He said it to tell people that what he was saying was very important. He also did that in what we will read today. Listen to what he says

John 6:53

Jesus said: “Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you”

Did you notice something special here? How many times did he say Amen here? [Two]

When Jesus told us things that are very, very, very, very important he uses Amen twice to show us that we need to know it.

When do you use the word Amen? [Prayer]

When we say Amen after a prayer we agree that what was said is true and that we together believe what other people have said for us.

<*Children leave for their groups*>

3.3.3. In Scripture: John 6:51-69**3.3.4. In the Sermon: Cannibalism in John 6****3.3.5. Hymn # 485 "To God be the glory"****3.4. Our Response to the Lord****3.4.1. Prayer of Dedication**

Minister: Let us pray together:

Lord we dedicate ourselves to you with all our heart and mind and body.

We trust you, we believe in you even in times

when what you say to us

and what happens to us does not make sense to us.

When we hate what life is doing to us

when what you say to us seems to be crazy.

Even then we trust and believe in you

and we will trust and believe in you also in times to come

Because we know we are your children and we have faithfully put all our life
into your hands, we depend on you.

We know no other life than the life that comes from you, O Lord. And we
join Peter in what he said to you 2000 years ago:

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

3.4.2. Gathering of Offerings

The Piano is accompanying the collection of the offerings.

3.4.3. Offertory**3.4.4. *Doxology #592 "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow"****3.4.5. Prayer of the People and the Lord's Prayer**

Now we will have a time during which we can bring our concerns before the
Lord. Please feel free to thank the Lord and pray for concerns on your heart.

We will close with the Lord's Prayer

<Time of Silence and Personal Prayers>

And all that still is on our heart that we bring to you in the prayer that you
taught your disciples saying:

Our Father who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

**And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
And to not lead us into temptation
but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever.
Amen.**

3.5. Going out in God's Name

3.5.1. Benediction (Lift Hands)

The Lord bless thee and keep thee
The Lord make his face shine upon thee.
and be gracious unto thee,
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.
Go out now with the blessing of the one who is from eternity to eternity.

3.5.2. Hymn "Let there be Peace on Earth"

Please let me say a few words before we sing "Let there be Peace on Earth".
The Peace of God is something joyful, so let us have some more movements
to make it more lively. Could we just move from side to side - as a first step
perhaps?

<Sing: "Let there be Peace on Earth">

3.5.3. Passing of the Peace

4. Ideas

Topic is John 6:51-58 Jesus the Bread of Life. I will include verse -69

Key Points after superficial reading:

Offense of eating Flesh and Blood of Jesus. Relate to Jesus nature. Die to self => eternal life.

Connection to the Eucharist

Symbolic: Flesh = Follow the Words of Jesus. Blood = Forgiveness.

Promise of eternal life connected. Connected with the life of Jesus

Exclusivism (Verse 44)

Offense. Are we ready to stay with God despite the Offense. Bible is very offensive.

Do we need to cleanse the Bible?

Faith of Peter despite the offense.

Title: Cannibalism in John 6.

Creative Illustration of the Bread on the Cross

March? Sing? Move Congregation.

5. Exegesis

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom Illustration in the reading of Psalm 111 of the need to respect God.

Eph 5:15-20 Careful as you live. Give praise.

V51 Jesus the Living bread. Living important since it signifies that this is not Bread in itself but a person.

This person mediates life!

My flesh = the whole dedication of Christ to this task with Body soul and spirit. Same demanded of us.

God -> Flesh (John 1:14) and the Flesh now makes the everlasting life possible.

V51 Announcement of Jesus death.

V52 Jews curious and disputing: How does this work? Can this work?

V53-58 Life deeply connected with Jesus. Exclusivity. Everlasting life is connected with JC. Double Amen shows significance.

Flesh = Life of Jesus. Take him as a sacrifice for us

Blood = Forgiveness of Sins.

V54 uses very hard word for eat.

V57 Through Jesus taking part in the life of God. This is only through Jesus.

Strong connection between Bread/Eat/Manna and Live/life

V60 Disciples rejecting Jesus. Free decision. No pressure from Jesus.

Problems with the faith of the Jews here. This passage shows how to overcome them.

V61 Open confrontation : Jesus talks openly disciples murmur behind his back.

skandalizein (Greek)!

6,66. Jesus lost a big part of his followers and disciples.

Separation between disciples.

V67 Decision. First use of the Twelve in John.

V68 Only Jesus has that message of everlasting life. A confession also in troubling circumstances

6. Sources

Maier, Gerhard Bibelkommentar Band 6: Johannes-Evangelium 1. Teil, Haenssler Verlag, 1989