

## SERMON FOR THE 5<sup>th</sup> MID-WEEK LENTEN SERVICE, 2020

### The Warrior Rejected by many Followers

John 6:66-68

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon tonight is John 6:66-68: **After this, many of His disciples went back and did not walk with Him any longer.** <sup>67</sup> **Therefore, Jesus asked the Twelve, “Surely you too do not want to go away?”**

<sup>68</sup> **Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Every day, somewhere, couples split up. What starts as a blossoming relationship soon turns sour. Friendly discussions turn to disagreements and arguments over all sorts of things, and the “wow” of the relationship turns to “ugh.”

Jesus once inspired excitement - the “wow” when He began His ministry. Yet the “ugh” entered the hearts of some as they came to reject Him.

Jesus’ earthly ministry was coming to a close. For two years, crowds had regularly followed Him, eagerly watching and listening. Shortly after He had fed a crowd of five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish, the people began to think that they should make Jesus their king. They were even going to take Him by force, probably so they could keep Him there at the Sea of Galilee and get all that free food and maybe also be free of disease.<sup>1</sup> Keep in mind too that all of these people were part of the chosen nation that God had carefully protected for more than two thousand years. They knew that God had promised a Saviour, and they were looking at Jesus as that Promised One.

Tragically, their expectations were for a Saviour who would give them food and health. Some of their spiritual leaders had abandoned the beautiful promises of the Saviour from sin and the giver of eternal life. They had turned those promises into a prediction of a king who would throw out the hated Roman rulers and establish a kingdom on earth with unlimited bread and health. How could that have happened? *An enemy had been at work!* He had attacked the Bible. Satan had convinced the spiritual leaders with a lie to reject Jesus. Many others had chosen to do the same.

Jesus resisted their efforts to make Him a king and withdrew from them. The next day, the crowd found Jesus and had many questions. The subject turned, naturally, to bread. That’s when Jesus said, *“I am the Bread of life. The person who comes to Me will certainly not be hungry and the person who believes in Me will certainly never be thirsty”* (John 6:35).

The crowd had bread on their mind, but the bread Jesus offered them was so different from what they expected. He told them that He had come from His Father in heaven. Jesus was the Bread from heaven, and all who “ate” the Bread from heaven, that is, who took Him in by faith, would live *forever*. He would raise them up on the Last Day, but they seemed to stop listening. Instead of heeding and glorifying in this news, many turned around and headed home.

But it wasn’t just the crowd of thousands who walked away. Jesus had a group of disciples whom He was training to reach out with the gospel to the vast mission field in Galilee and beyond. Even to them, the words

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:1-15

of Jesus, the Bread from heaven, were difficult to understand. How could He claim to give them eternal life? *“Therefore, when they heard this, many of His disciples said, ‘This is a hard statement. Who can listen to it?’”* (John 6:60). And right after this, we learn, **“After this, many of His disciples went back and did not walk with Him any longer.”**

It’s hard to accept that some of Jesus’ disciples would desert Him. They were people who had walked all those kilometres with Jesus, had slept on the ground many nights, had eaten with Him, and had witnessed His many miracles. Jesus was the most fascinating person who had ever walked on the face of the earth. When He spoke, it was with a kind of authority that no one had ever heard before!

This was the Saviour of the world who had come to offer His perfect life in exchange for our sin at the battle on Calvary. He was getting ready for that battle and had been preparing the troops to carry on, and some of them leave. They did not believe Jesus had the authority or power to grant eternal life. They rejected Him. They divorced themselves from Him. The “wow” had turned to “ugh.” It was so sad when His own rejected Him.

The enemy of Jesus had gotten to the hearts and minds of the Jewish leaders and others. He had led them to believe the lie that Jesus couldn’t be who He had said and shown He was. The leaders were teaching false doctrine of the worst kind to their people: that they could somehow get to heaven by trying to be good people and following the law. Jesus was simply telling them what He had said at the beginning of His ministry: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). They planned to kill Him and reject His message.

We begin to see the huge forces Jesus was fighting against. How does the awe for Jesus go out of someone who’s been that exposed to Him? An enemy did this.

It wasn’t just back then.

The enemy still hates Jesus and, as much as he can, still fights hard against Him. The enemy has encouraged lost people to grow deeper in their separation from God by establishing numerous false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, atheism, materialism, and many more, all of them offering some sort of path to God or a substitute for God, a path that leads only to hell.

He has also made inroads into the Christian church, spreading false doctrine, attacking the Bible, and using critics of Christianity in the media, in universities, and in politics to damage and destroy saving faith. You know about the growing numbers of “dones” - people who have left the church and say they won’t come back. And the “nones” - people who claim they have no religious affiliation. Satan is a terrorist who is cornered and knows he’s going to die - but he wants to take as many as he possibly can with him.

Even here in our own church, we have some members who once enthusiastically promised that they would remain faithful to Jesus and His Word, even if they had to die to do that. Those confirmation vows have been broken. Something has happened to take away their joy of being in God’s house.

Maybe you have someone close who is slipping or has lost his or her faith. We all sometimes struggle with a personal doubt about something God says. Our doubts and questions keep buzzing in our brain. So you can understand Jesus when He turns to the smaller group of disciples with a question. Listen carefully to this question: **Jesus asked the Twelve, “Surely you too do not want to go away?”**

Jesus gives the disciples the opportunity to make a clear answer. Was there emotion in His voice? Did they hesitate? Did they want time to see how many others were staying first, before they gave their answer? We don’t know, but this we do know, His gracious words of life draw us ever closer to Him.

<sup>68</sup> **Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.”** I love Peter here because he is so spot on: **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.”**

When God created the world, He simply spoke, “*Let there be...*,” and there were light and dirt and stars and galaxies and lions and butterflies - a universe beyond understanding. He just spoke! What power God has in His words!

When we pick up our Bibles, we are holding in our own hands God’s own love story toward us - His words of life, forgiveness, and salvation. These words have terrific power. You know the passage in Romans where Paul tells us, “*Therefore, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17).

Only God knows how many believing Christians there are in the world, but this I do know: Every single one of them did absolutely nothing to create saving faith in their hearts. Everyone - you and I too - came by only one very powerful means, one agency, one path. It doesn’t matter if it is spoken, read, or received in a tactile, visible fashion called Baptism. It’s the single most potent force for good in our world: GOD’S WORD! That’s what brought you and me to trust that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has purchased and won for us the forgiveness of all our sins! He did it all and paid it all for us! He loves us enough to die so that we shall live with Him forever. So can you see why Jesus fought false teachers so hard?

He said, “*Beware of false prophets! They come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ferocious wolves*” (Matthew 7:15). They continue to oppose Jesus and lure you to abandon your Saviour. They have a lot of opinions and theories, but they do not have the words of eternal life. There is only one source for that, and Peter had it right: “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.**”

Peter and the others were blessed and did not want to lose what Jesus had given them. We are also blessed. You and I have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God! We are forgiven and have eternal life.

Jesus becomes our guest preacher here every time we come to listen. He promises to take us through the door marked “Death.” He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.<sup>2</sup> It was Martin Luther who once said, “*If you were to ask a Christian what his task is and by what he is worthy of the name of Christian, there could be no other response than hearing the Word of God, that is, faith. Ears are the only organs of the Christian.*”<sup>3</sup> Did you catch that? “*Ears are the only organs of the Christian.*”

We are just two-and-a-half weeks away from Easter. Continue to let the season of Lent be time to grow more deeply in the Word. Have renewed zeal to make better use of the Word. Start your own personal reading program or home devotions. Start tonight or tomorrow by reading chapter 12 of John’s Gospel, and then a chapter each day to the end of this Gospel. It is the story of our Saviour’s last week on earth, and it’s riveting reading.

We are challenged every day to hold on tightly to God’s Word when we see and hear all the stuff the world, our sinful flesh, and Satan throws at us. It’s a pretty steady flood. So if Jesus were to ask us right now, “**Surely you too do not want to go away?**” join me in answering “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.**” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> John 14:6

<sup>3</sup> *Theology of the Reformers*, Timothy George, p. 56.