

Sermon – August 15, 2021
“Why Stick With Jesus”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID
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Grace, mercy and peace be to each of you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

I invite you to pray with me as we open ourselves up once again to the teaching of God’s Word.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus the Christ, who through his faithfulness, gave us an example to follow as we live in obedience to Your will. We pray in Christ’s holy name. Amen.

There was something about this man in the Marine Corps uniform, that the teachers, and staff, and students noticed. It was partially the way he walked, and talked with people, in his very quiet, assured, and friendly manner.

The other recruiters made promises and talked about how great their branch of the service was, and that theirs had opportunities that the other branches did not. Even though only given a brief two minutes, the other recruiters took far more than their allotted time.

Finally, the older marine sergeant rose, as the principal apologized and said there were only two minutes left to the entire assembly. The sergeant nodded and went to the podium, and for 60 long seconds, looked intently at the students.

His eyes went two and fro. Finally, without great volume, but with a sureness that everyone was listening, the old marine simply said this:

“I will not promise you anything except hardship. Hard living conditions, hard long days of work, and little reward. I want you to know this, that only two or three of you, will be strong enough physically, mentally and emotionally, to be part of the Marine Family. I want to see those 2 or 3 boys at lunch.”

No recruiter saw such a response. There was more competition to talk to the old sergeant than any college recruiter, or any other military recruiter present that career day.

I believe that story illustrates the lives of those we read about in the Gospel today, those who decided to follow Jesus, and not just simply walk away like the others. Let me rephrase the sergeant’s words a bit, to offer insight into the decisions made that day by those high school students.

Following Jesus is not a “religion” of ease. There are very few promises of God that make our lives easier. We are not promised that the WANTS and DESIRES of our hearts will be granted, or that we will live lives of comfort.

Often, we even struggle with Christ’s words, trying to understand that it is not our strength that makes us children in His Kingdom, but our weaknesses.

So, in a sense, the question becomes “Are we weak enough, to receive that which the apostles were granted?” Are we weak enough to believe God, and take Him at His promise?”

Now back to the disciples who turned their backs on Jesus and walked away, which we can call...

“the Don'ts” ... because these people STARTED with the message, they did not start with the messenger.

And consequently, they didn't “get” it. They grumble and complain.

After NO attempt to understand, or have Jesus clarify and expand on His teaching, they chose to become offended ... and walk away. They don't believe, and so they turn their backs on Jesus ... they turn their backs on His offer of eternal life.

The first verse of today's gospel concludes a section where Jesus is teaching. As we looked at the passage last week, we cautioned against judging the disciples too quickly, since we have knowledge today that they did not have back then ... specifically, we know about the cross, the resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, and they did NOT.

For them, to hear that Jesus was going to give them His body to eat, and His blood to drink must have sounded a bit strange, if not downright bizarre!

It is here, that many of Jesus' disciples made a CRUCIAL MISTAKE, for they considered the message on its own merits, rather than thinking about who is speaking the message.

It confuses them, and they start complaining among themselves about the message. I find it fascinating that they complained, NOT TO Jesus, but to each other.

Rather than wait for Jesus to explain, they started thinking they knew more than God. Rather than ask Jesus, as they had before, or wait for further explanation, which Jesus often provided, they started complaining. Simply put, they didn't “get it”.

Jesus is NOT unaware of this result. The Bible tells us that Jesus knew from the beginning, literally from before the ages, who believed ... who had faith, and who did not.

And so, He once again raises the stakes, and notes that there are those who do not trust Him, who do not have faith, and who do not believe in His words.

Listen again to what Jesus says...

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and 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.” John 6:63-64

Rather than consider the One who gave the message, the One who spoke the message, they chose to take great offense at the message.

Or, perhaps the offense they took was that they couldn't understand the message?

It is not hard to do, remember when you were kids and your parents said, “you will understand when you are older”? How did you react when you HEARD that phrase?

But Jesus’ great teaching that we receive life through His sacrifice, through His body being given, and his blood being shed for us on the cross, is lost to them. They go from complaining, to no longer trusting, to outright betraying Jesus.

Another great word picture there – they literally tossed Him aside, as if He had no significance. Now, think again about what I just said.

Since they don’t understand clearly what He is teaching them, they toss Him and His teaching aside and walk away.

It’s as though WALKING with God is not a thing to be valued or cherished, so they do not try to understand, but simply walk away and not follow Jesus any longer, because it is hard and may take some effort.

But isn’t that the nature of unbelief ... you GIVE UP that which you DO NOT KNOW the value of.

Rather than listen and hear the very gospel that is the power of God to save them, they argue about it among themselves, and dismiss it. They apparently knew more about life and living than God Himself.

Isn’t that still the problem with people today who would rather not deal with Jesus? They dismiss Christian teachings, toss aside any hope of eternal life, and decline the joy of walking with God, and living with the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They choose to argue about how a fish can swallow a human being, and then the man stays alive. Or, how Creation cannot have happened so fast, even with an omnipotent, omniscient God causing it.

As the people abandon Jesus, as they abandon all that He is going to give them, by giving up His body to be crucified ... as they abandon the riches found in Christ Jesus, He turns to His closest disciples, the apostles, and asks them...

“Do you also want to go away?”

Remember, in this passage, it says Jesus knew from the beginning who would believe and not believe. So, He knew the answer before He even asked the question.

He knew they trusted in Him, as the Holy One of God. They had even started to understand what it meant to walk with God. They still had a long way to go, but belief, faith, and trust was there.

So, even though Jesus knew the answer, He wanted them to actually say the words that the Father had given them ... the incredible truth that Jesus is Immanuel ... “God with us”.

We have talked a lot about the DON’TS, so now, I would like to talk a little about the DO’S...

The Do's

So, Peter again makes an incredible confession. Peter appears to be so enthusiastic, almost childlike in the way he treasures that which God reveals to him. Let me take a little poetic license with his answer ...

“Lord, uh, where else, who else could we go to? There is NO one else with words like You have spoken. No One! How could we leave you, when we have faith, when we have come to realize, when we have come to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God? Where else could we go?”

Peter's confession is incredible, and indeed, it had to come from God the Father, for according to Jesus, no one else could give it to Peter. Peter and the other Apostles judged the messenger worthy of listening to, and accepts by faith a message that can only be understood in the shadow of the cross.

The Apostles didn't need to understand everything about what Jesus said, right then. For they knew Jesus, and trusted that all would be revealed in time. And isn't that the very essence of Faith?

According to the book of Hebrews...

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”
Hebrews 11:1

Faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Faith that what He promised in giving us His Body to eat and His blood to drink would deliver us to eternal life.

That is the real basis of our “religion” - of our faith – the belief and trust that Jesus is the Christ. Here is how John, decades later, stated the same thing again in 1 John 4...

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.” 1 John 4:13-17

The Apostles saw nowhere else to go, with their trust and knowledge of Jesus. He dealt with the mysteries of God in a very simple way. He let God be God and rested in His faith.

You and I occasionally are in that same place, where we don't have all the answers to our questions about God and His revealed Word.

But we too have come to believe, to have faith, and we KNOW with certainty that Jesus the Christ is indeed the Son of the living God.

And that He lived and died and rose again to unite us to Him in our Baptisms, to strengthen that faith in the Lord's Supper, and through His Word.

As a result, we have God's peace, the unsurpassed peace of knowing that He guards our hearts and our minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen ... may it be so ... Amen

PRAYER: "Dear God, we thank You for calling us into Your Kingdom, and for opening heaven for us through our faith in Jesus. We pray that you would show us the quiet times in our lives, teach us to pray unceasingly, and let our amens be calls to action. We pray in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen"