

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

"This is a hard saying; who can accept it?"

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We have come to the end of Our Lord's discourse on the bread of life, and he has revealed, in no uncertain terms, what the food of our salvation shall be. Therefore, hear again the saying of The Lord:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."

For who would not turn away from this madness? That we should eat a man's flesh, and drink his blood, and thereby gain eternal life?

It must be just a metaphor, for otherwise *it is a hard saying*.

But if it were merely a metaphor, why did the masses abandon Jesus?

It must be just a symbol, for otherwise *it is a hard saying*.

But if it were merely a symbol, why did the people *grumble among themselves*?

It must have some secret meaning, some cryptic message.

But if it were a hidden thing, why would Our Lord have asked *'Do you take offense at this?'*

Our Lord asks if the crowd takes offense because the crowd is not wrong. The saying *is hard. To accept it is offensive.*

For religion is a thing of the soul and spirit, or so we believe. But Christ would have us know that true religion is a thing of flesh and blood.

For religion is a thing of lofty, heavenly thoughts. But Christ would have us know that true religion is a thing of concreteness and truth.

For religion is a thing which causes our minds to dive into profound realms. But Christ would have us know that true religion is a thing for the simple.

For as it concerns the pietistic man, the lofty soul, the profound mind, such words as Jesus has spoken, such words which deal in flesh and blood and earth, that is, such words that deal with the things seen in this life, in this world; as it concerns such people, these are words that are beneath them. They seek after that which is other-worldly and beyond mankind. Christ guides them to the world without end, his own humanity.

Therefore, Our Lord has spoken, *'Let the little children come to me.'*

For there is no place in the kingdom for such pride of mind that scorns these offensive, even carnal teachings of Jesus. So he calls them that have no pride. He calls to them that are, indeed, very simple. For what does a little child know, besides flesh and blood, food and drink? For children know a simple truth, that there is no life outside of life within their body. Children know a simple truth, that there is no staving off death, lest it be with food. We, who think ourselves wise love to speak of soul and spirit and mind. But the child knows what is true: a body which bleeds, flesh which must eat, and that without this body, by which they eat, and play, and walk into church, there is no life, but death alone. The adult has been deluded by his education to be lost in his thoughts. The child lives in the harshness of the world.

'Therefore, let the little children come to me.'

For Wisdom herself calls to those uninstructed; to them that have no vanity and arrogance concerning their own religiosity or intellect. She calls: *'Whoever is simple, let him turn here! Come, eat of my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed.'*

'Eat of my bread.' *'And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'*

'Drink the wine I have mixed.' 'For whoever drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.'

The masses grumble at this *hard saying*, and walk away.

They leave him, even as he offers them all they desire, food, and spirit, and life. They did not listen.

'My Words are Spirit.' And *'It is the Spirit which gives life.'* And *'And the Word took on flesh, and was made man.'* There is no Spirit apart from the Word. There is no Word apart from the flesh. There is no flesh apart from the man, this man Jesus, who invites, speaking ineffable *'Take, eat and drink.'*

Who now remains? The seemingly thoughtful masses have forsaken the Lord, for they are seemingly too thoughtful for God's thoughts. The children have followed their parents home, likely to be told to dismiss the words they hear as little insanities *lest they too repent and be saved.*

Who now remains? None, it seems, but the twelve. *'So Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away as well?"'*

They have remained, for they are not proud as the masses. But do not be misled, for they have not stayed because they are somehow as simple as the children, for these, remember, are the same disciples about which it is written, *'And they rebuked the people for bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed, but Jesus said "Hinder them not, for to such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven."'*

'So Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away as well?"'

'And Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"'

They remain not from simplicity. They remain not from lack of pride. They remain because of despair. *'To whom shall we go?'*

It is common enough these days to hear of how strong one is in the Lord. How they are more than conquerors. How their prayer life is striving. But Our

Lord does not come for the victor, but for the vanquished. Nor does he come for the successful, but the broken. *For it is not the well who need a physician, but the sick.*

For it is the Pharisee who prays: *'I thank you Lord, that I am not like others.'*

But it is the Word of God itself which prays: *'My soul is full of anguish, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am shut in, that I cannot escape, my eye grows dim with sorrow.'*

Wipe away all pretense from your eyes; cast away all self-deception. Who here this day does not sorrow? Who here has not known anguish? Who here has not seen love turned to hatred, life turned to death, bodies turned to dust, friendship turned to coldness? Whose soul among you does not *draw near to Sheol?*

If you are a son of Adam, and a daughter of Eve, all these things you know. Therefore *'taste, and see that the Lord is good.'*

Our Lord has established an everlasting meal. He has set a table *in the midst of our enemies*, as guests he has surrounded us with Saints and Patriarchs of every age and generation; as the host, Our Father in Heaven himself, the master of ceremonies. Seraphs and Thrones and Dominions he has designated our waiters; and The Spirit Himself he has appointed to pour then the choicest wine of Christ's blood into the chalice of this most common of churches; and the Son makes himself the food of everlasting life.

It will be a joyous occasion, even as it is a joyous occasion every Sunday as we enter into this heavenly banquet. And, perhaps with a weak smile, you will motion over one of the waiting angels of heaven, and ask him ever so politely why you have been invited to this rapturous feast.

And perhaps the angel will respond in affection, and in tenderness:

'The Lord is near to the brokenhearted. And saves the crushed in spirit.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Proverbs 9:1-10, Ephesians 5:6-21; John 6:51-69.