

John 6:60-69

August 30, 2015

Pastor P. Martin

Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY

Pentecost 14

John 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴ 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. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

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

Dear Friends in Christ,

We all get easily distracted. Nowhere is the more true than in church. A woman recently confessed—now this is not someone from here, from Kentucky—she confessed to me that if her pastor doesn't put his robe on exactly straight, all she can think about for most of the sermon is how she would like to straighten it for that poor wayward pastor.

Which has a lot to do with today because, in case you are wondering: No, I didn't break my glasses. I got contacts. And now, with that settled, we cannot be distracted and get to the point at hand, God's Word.

NO COMPROMISE

Horseraces can be fascinating. Watch one horse break out to an early lead, and then lag. The favorite, all the while, hangs back just a bit, and heading into the final stretch blazes away, only to get caught at the wire by a mid-pack contender.

In no year that I can remember, has presidential politics so mirrored horseracing, whichever party you follow. The odds-makers thought we had front-runners, but now no one knows what the outcome will be next July, much less in November. Many who usually couldn't care less, find themselves interested in a presidential primary.

Just such happened in Galilee in John chapter six. The Gospel readings for the last four weeks have followed an exciting 36 hours of Jesus' life. It had all the drama of a horse race, or a presidential primary. It opened with Jesus drawing in thousands and thousands of people. He was leading in all the polls. And the 36 hours end in our reading with a crisis of popular opinion. Literally overnight, Jesus dropped 50 or 60 points in the polls.

What could have caused him to lose so much support? Did he offend his constituency? Were his policy positions not popular? Was he too exclusive? All of the above. It's wrapped up in his question:

I. "Does This Offend You?"

Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. They were devoted Jesus followers. When Jesus called them, they hung up every bit of their former life on the rusty nail in the garage to follow Jesus. No

longer were they fishermen, tax collectors and whatever else. It appeared that they had hitched their wagons to a rising star.

Jesus had achieved tremendous popularity. He fed thousands by a miracle, and the next day those thousands of people, all wondering what came next and knowing it didn't really matter because they knew they were witnessing history in the making, all those people hanging on his every word—and as he talks, the electricity fades. As the disciples watched Jesus and the crowds, their dreams died.

No, I don't think the disciples were trying to cash in. I think they were thinking what we think we have a Sunday with great attendance. They were glad to see so many people coming to the Messiah. They felt encouraged. They vaguely hoped that the upward spiral would continue. But when Jesus started talking turkey, the crowds started arguing. He said things like, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (51). Which led to our reading: ***"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'"***

You know how sometimes there are people on the radio or TV that you just can't stand to listen to? You hear the voice and it grates, your muscles tense up. You reflexively reach for the remote or the power button. It's worse than fingernails on a chalkboard.

That was the crowd listening to Jesus. ***"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*** And if I were one of the disciples I am starting to get worried as I watch my teacher make mistakes and embarrass himself. I'm thinking, "Come on Jesus, maybe you could try to smooth over the differences?"

But Jesus goes the opposite direction. ***"Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!"*** Jesus ups the ante. He says, "Are you offended? Let me offend you more and more!" The Twelve disciples closest to Jesus are dying. You know, like when a loved one makes a fool of himself in front of you and a small crowd. Your internal emotions of love for that person and at the same time embarrassment are at war. You are dying inside. I think that is what is happening in the disciples. So many Jesus followers suddenly getting angry and annoyed with Jesus, and every word that comes from his mouth just makes it worse! But Jesus was not in a popularity contest or an election.

In politics you have to account for two things: your convictions and people's approval. We all want politicians whose convictions match our own. But we also know that a politician must appeal to many people, or else he is never going to get anywhere. So a politician has to shine the apples and watch what he says to different groups, and talk about the parts of his position that appeal to people. But the politician also has to hide his convictions which he knows will not be popular. In short, he can't be totally up-front and truthful at all times, or else he has no chance to be elected. That is the reality of politics.

But Jesus doesn't do that because Jesus deals in Truth, with a capital "T". And the truth is the way to be saved. He says that he is the only way to be saved. And whether this is offensive or not, Jesus doesn't care because he loves us enough to be truthful. If you don't believe that Jesus is our Savior from our sins, you will die in your sins. In case you doubt that strong language, look it up in John 8:24. Jesus does not hide the truth because hiding the truth can only result in damnation.

Jesus will not shine the apples just to be liked. How valuable that is for us to remember! We should never change the truth of God's Word just to appease other people, because Jesus does not want us to. And yet we do. We hedge the truth with words like, "Well, our church is really strict about this or that..." as if it wouldn't be that way if we had our say about it. That is actually toying with God's Word, and we need to repent of those times when we get cowardly with the truth of God.

We can't be politicians with the truth. We can't change the truth of God's word for one set of

relatives, and say something different for others. Either it is what God says or it is not.

Look at it this way: Jesus loved to be with people. The only time he wasn't, was when he was deep in personal prayer. I don't think Jesus enjoyed being offensive. He did what we all wish we could do: be as winsome and popular as we could possibly be, while still being rock-solid on the things that matter. And when it came to the way to get to heaven, Jesus insisted that he is the only way, even if it offended people.

So, here's a question: Do we have the right to be offensive when we speak God's truth to other people? Here is what I have to say about that: May **I** never be the reason people are offended. Let me say it again, I ask God that **I** am never the reason people are offended. But here is the problem. I am a human being, and so are you. And so it can happen that I lose my temper and offend someone. God forgive me. It can happen that I say something in a way that sounds bad. God forgive me because I have put a barrier between God and that person. It can happen that people just don't like my sense of humor, or the way I talk, or look, or whatever else. If the fault is in me, God forgive me. If the fault is in you, God help you to be understanding of my limitations.

If what I say offends someone else, the only reason that is to happen is not because it is what I, Peter Martin, am saying, but because I repeat what one greater than I has said. And that sometimes happens.

Having said that, I as your pastor want to say something. If I ever offend any of you—and it will happen, because I am human and you are human—I ask that you do one of two things. Either please forgive me, or come talk to me. That goes for however long the Lord continues to hold out his call to me here at Faith in Radcliff. Jesus sometimes will be the reason that people walk away from church. As in our reading, sometimes people simply don't want to hear what God has to say. God does offend some. But may I, may you never be the reason.

II. "You Do Not Want To Leave To... Do You?"

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (66). The party was over. The guests left. There stood Jesus with the Twelve and probably a few of the women who funded his preaching ministry.

Can you feel the loneliness? When thousands of people all at once turn their backs at you, dismissing you... Can you imagine what that felt like? The candidate for class president who got 4 votes. You feel like everyone has declared you worthless. The disciples had not tied their wagon to a rising star; they had lashed themselves to a sinking ship! And just then Jesus looks deep into the souls of his disciples and asks what all of them are thinking but none of them dares say, *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* I think they wavered. It forced a decision on their part.

Christians sometimes end up in that position. Maybe even some of you are. You feel alone. No one else in the school lunch room or your department at work prays before they have their lunch. All your neighbors, when it comes to Sunday morning, are sleeping in, or at a sporting event, or out fishing. It gets kind of embarrassing when week after week you give the church excuse you can't do what everyone else is doing. Jesus looks at you, and looks into your heart and asks, *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* And you kind of do, because taking the rejection is hard, and being different is hard, and not doing the things that show you are part of the group is awkward. It seems like Jesus always has a way of complicating life and relationships. *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"*

What is it about Jesus that makes you and I, at times, want to not acknowledge Jesus; or at least not in a way that others will notice?

I don't claim to have the last word in this. Other people might come up with other and better reasons. But here is one of the reasons.

Our identity is wrapped up in ourselves. Our worth and status in society is determined by wearing the clothes, having the look, listening to the music, putting on the attitudes, achieving success. What we do and are prove that we are part of a group, part of the group. It isn't that we have this all-consuming need to be "cool" enough for everyone else. We simply want to be accepted. But here is the thing about Jesus: by invoking the name Jesus, in a way, we are self-negating ourselves before the world. Jesus is a Savior, and "Savior" means that we are, in some way, insufficient. When I bring Jesus into the equation, no longer is my life mine, but it is under the direction of Jesus, and I lose a bit of my autonomy and my identity is not my own.

There sits Jesus, saying that he is the only way to life. Inviting us to lean on him, to trust in him, to give our burdens to him, to hand our lives to him, so that he can supply us with what we are unable to supply.

All the while, the entire world around us is wearing the clothes, having the look, listening to the music, putting on the attitudes, achieving success—walking away from Jesus.

“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.’” Amen – So Shall It Be – Amen.