

14th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B
September 6, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
John 6:60-69
Pastor Paul Horn

“Does this offend you?”

⁶⁰ On hearing it (Jesus’ teaching that he is the bread of life), 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.”

Someone might be offended... if you were to stand at the gates of Fort Knox and protest that the government gives too much money to the Army, if you were to stand in downtown Detroit and hold up signs for Toyota, BMW and Hyundai, if you were stand in the middle of Texas cattle country and claim that the vegetarian lifestyle is the only way to go, or to push for gun control at a NRA meeting, or oppose the health care bill at the democratic convention – someone will be offended.

Jesus himself did not shy away from confrontational statements. In Matthew 15:12 Jesus said, “**These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.**” His disciples said to their teacher, “**Did you know that the Pharisees were offended when you said this?**” And in today’s lesson from John 6, some of Jesus’ own disciples were offended by his words. Keep in mind that these disciples were not the 12 closest disciples. Jesus had many others who followed him and they also went out to share the good news of the kingdom of God. In our lesson, the gospel writer John tells us that many of the Teacher’s other disciples were grumbling amongst themselves about something Jesus had said, “**This is a hard teaching. Who can accept (believe) it?**” What had Jesus said that caused them to think this way?

In the previous verses of this chapter, Jesus had made the claim, “**I am the Bread of life. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.**” In others words, “It is necessary to have faith in me as your Savior for salvation. There is no other way.” Jesus, knowing their thoughts asked them, “**Does this offend you?**” Literally, “*Are you scandalized by my words? Do they trip you up?*” They did offend these particular disciples. So much so that John tells us they turned and walked away. They no longer followed Jesus.

Nothing new has changed. The people of the sinful world are still offended by Jesus' teachings. Just watch History or Discovery Channel as they try to debunk any and all of the miracles Bible claims to have truly happened: the creation of the world in six, 24 hour days, the flood, the 10 plagues, crossing of the Red Sea, the resurrection, the existence of hell, or the teaching that baptism saves, even little babies; that Christ's body and blood are truly present with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. The sinful world is scandalized by the main teaching of the Bible: justification - that we are declared not guilty by Christ's death on the cross. The sinful world is offended that our works count for nothing, that there is only one way to heaven, and that there are not many paths to heaven as Oprah continues to preach to her flock. That's why the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "**The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.**" (1:23)

Why do the teachings of Jesus offend people? Jesus explains in vs63, "**The flesh counts for nothing.**" What Jesus is saying here is that the sinful human nature is not good for anything. Why? Scripture tells us that all people are born spiritually blind, dead, and are enemies of God. Faith, the desire to follow and be a disciple, belief that what Jesus says is true, is not something we come up with on our own or choose to do naturally because of our sinful nature. This is why Jesus says in vs65, "**No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.**" Perhaps a better translation of the Greek is, "*No one can come to me unless it has been given to him by the Father.*" Faith and belief have to be given by the Father. But the world asks, "But about free will?" Free will enables you to make choices in life, to wear black socks or white socks, to drink regular or unleaded coffee, to buy a car at the Chevy or Ford dealership. But free will does not enable you to make spiritual decisions. By nature, the only choice we make is the wrong one, the choice to disobey and to walk the path to hell. We decide to disobey, because we are dead, blind, enemies. The sinful nature is good for nothing.

The good news is that by God's grace, Jesus later tells us in John 15:16, "**You did not choose me, but I chose you.**" Jesus chose to save you from your sinful nature. He called you to saving faith through the working of the Holy Spirit, as he says in vs63, "**The Spirit gives life. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life.**" The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel: the good news that Jesus had declared us not guilty by his death and resurrection. This gospel message is found in the Scriptures and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That is where the Holy Spirit works. The working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel is why you and I are no longer blind, but can now see and know Jesus, and believe in him and have the peace of knowing that we are no longer his enemies, but his children and heirs of eternal life.

However, the sinful nature still poses a problem for me. There are times when I don't want to hear what Jesus says. His words are offensive to my sinful nature. Your sinful nature does not want to hear that you are wrong and that you daily sin in God's eyes. Have you ever caught yourself rationalizing or justifying your sins, making excuses for your poor choices, so that you don't feel so bad or guilty? The sinful nature causes you to excuse skipping church, to justify having sex when you're not married, for doing

drugs, drinking in excess, lusting with your eyes, gossiping, stealing, using God's name to curse and so on. Our human reason tries to put itself above Scripture.

The sinful nature is good for nothing. Do you ever wonder why some of the doctrines of the Bible just don't make any sense, even though Scripture clearly says, "Thus says the Lord?" Because it doesn't make sense to our human reason. For example, if a man by his human reason tries to understand the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine, the human reason, even of a good, staunch Lutheran, rebels against this. This is true of all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: infant baptism, church fellowship, closed communion, predestination, roles of men and women in the church and home, marriage, sexuality, submission to authority... the sinful nature refuses to believe that there is one absolute authority that determines these doctrines. Even the doctrine of salvation by Christ alone is offensive to my sinful nature - because my sinful nature is prideful and wants to have some part in my salvation, however small it may be, whether saying that I decide to accept Christ or that my good works merit me eternal life, but not by Christ alone! Yes, the same "word" that offended the disciples offends our sinful nature.

Why is the sinful nature such a problem for me? When I rationalize my sins, try to justify what I do, say things like "I believe _____," but it can be found nowhere in Scripture, then I stray from the truth, from the Spirit who gives me the bread of life, then I am easy prey for Satan who would love nothing more than for my sinful nature to rule my life, to stray from the truth and make me believe that I'm really not that bad of a person, and if we believe that...then Satan has won us back.

What's truly offensive is our sins and the attitude of our sinful nature – offensive in God's sight. He demands to see our lives as a white garment that we wear. Instead he sees us adorned with filthy rags, stained, torn and tattered. Our sinful nature is good for nothing – it leads to death. We cry out like the apostle Paul, **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** (Rom 7:24,25) Christ Jesus won the victory over your sinful nature. Paul says, "You have been crucified with Christ." (Rom 6:3-7) That is, your sinful nature was nailed to the tree with Jesus, and there it died. Your offenses of justifying your sins and trying to rationalize the truths of Scripture, those offenses were buried with Christ. And just as Christ was raised from his grave, so also you, have been raised from death and given a new life. You have been raised holy, pure, clean and without sin. King David wrote in Psalm 51, **"Cleanse me and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."** Today with the threat of H1N1 flu the Center for Disease Control is urging Americans to cover their mouths when they cough, to wash their hands often, to avoid places where there's lots of people. But the hand sanitizer you use says, "Kills 99.9% of germs." That's not all of them. Jesus' death cleanses all your imperfections. It washes away all your offenses – for he is the Holy One of God. The Holy One has made you holy. At your baptism the Holy Spirit applied Christ's work to you, washing away your sins, cleansing you of your many offenses, drowning your sinful nature and creating a new person in you.

You are holy in God's sight, forgiven children of God... so what are you going to do about this wretched sinful nature that continues to plague you day after day, who rears his ugly head? You will daily kill him. You will say and read and study words that are offensive to him. The sinful nature hates to hear the words, "This body and blood was given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins." The sinful nature hates to hear the words, "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1John 1:7-9) The sinful nature dies when you remember your baptism. So we will be on the offensive and destroy our sinful nature every day, by remembering our baptism, by being faithful with the Lord's Supper, by studying the Word everyday.

And what about those teachings of the Bible that are hard to understand? We must never forget, that if an insight into a little understood passage is to come to us, it must come from the words themselves, since they are Spirit and life. Whenever we utter anything about religion or our beliefs, the words, "Thus say the Lord," must stand behind those words. It will not do us any good to support the doctrines of Christianity by arguments taken from logic or philosophy or any other human source. Notice that Christ was interrupted many times during his bread of life discourse (read all of John 6). But notice that never once did he answer these arguments with human reason, but by more vigorous expanding and amplifying the spiritual truths he had expressed. His words are Spirit and they are life, not arguments taken from human reason. We will do the same when we explain and defend the Scriptures.

My dear friends, I think it is safe to say that you have been offended in your life, either by something someone said or did. And I am here to tell you that it will happen again in your lifetime. But you have not heard anything more offensive in your life than these words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." – words most offensive to your sinful nature, for those words put your sinful nature to death and its place was created a new person, holy and pure in God's sight. Thank God that your new creation loves to hear those words. Amen.