

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 18th, 2024 (11:11 am)

A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK!

Psalm 34:12-22
Proverbs 9:1-10
Ephesians 5:6-21
John 6:51-69

Jesus Is the Word and Wisdom of God, Who Gives You Life and Light in His Flesh

Jesus is the divine Word by whom all things were made, who has become flesh and dwells among us. He gives His flesh *"for the life of the world,"* not only as a sacrifice for sin but as *"the living bread"* from heaven (John 6:51). Eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:54-57), and no longer walk in the darkness of sin, but walk in His light. *"Arise from the dead"* and live in Him, because you are *"light in the Lord"* (Eph. 5:8, 14). Being filled with His Spirit, confess Him to *"one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart"* (Eph. 5:18-19). Fear, love and trust in Him, *"and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness"* (Josh. 24:14). For He has brought you *"out of the house of slavery"* by His cross and resurrection, and now He does *"great signs"* in your sight (Josh. 24:17). Indeed, He is the divine wisdom, who has built His house, prepared His feast and set His table; He bids you to recline and eat of His bread and drink of the wine He has mixed (Prov. 9:1-5).

John 6:66-69: **⁶⁶After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."**

In John 6, Jesus speaks about ***"The Bread of Life."*** Jesus had been speaking to a crowd of people about His body and His blood. Some of the people there that day weren't there to listen to Him.

Jesus told His listeners that HE was ***"the bread of life."*** He told them that he had come down from heaven. And he also told them that their faith was not their own work – it was the result of God's work in them. The only way they could understand these difficult spiritual truths was by the enabling of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus then shocked the crowd by telling them that the "bread" he offered was his flesh. And the "drink" he had for them was his blood. John 6: 53: **⁵³So Jesus said to them, "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."**

Jesus' listeners struggled to understand his words. And they struggled even harder to accept them. Many turned away. For these people, Jesus' words about His body and His blood were scandalous – absolutely shocking – even blasphemous.

We need to remember that Jewish people had strong prohibitions against drinking blood. So, the people grumbled. They were deeply offended. For many, their "faith" in Jesus was shattered. And so, they walked away, disappointed. The word in our text this morning that's translated as "hard teaching" comes from a Greek word that means "dried out, tough and harsh." You might want to think of the phrase "**a tough nut to crack.**" The original word here refers to something that's hard to digest – something that weighs heavily on the stomach and causes great discomfort. A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK, INDEED!

Jesus was dealing with stubborn people of Israel. The real problem here wasn't Jesus at all. And it wasn't His words. The real problem was the people. They failed to see their sin problem. After hearing Jesus' words about the bread of life, they said, "*This is a hard teaching.*" And note carefully what they said next: "*WHO CAN ACCEPT IT?*" So, what do you think? *Who can accept God's word, then? Maybe it's just good people. Maybe righteous people. Maybe those who try harder. Who can accept God's word?* The Scriptures gives us the answer. And we don't like what we hear. **The Scriptures clearly say that, on our own, by our own strength, we cannot receive and accept God's word.**

Now, why would that be? Well, its because, by nature, we are all children of Adam, spiritually dead, and blind. Why is it? Because, by nature, original sin means that we are all enemies of God. By nature, there's no spiritual life in us – not even a spark. And that's true until the Holy Spirit, working through God's Word and the Sacraments, works a miracle in us – a miracle called "faith." So, *who then can accept Jesus' words?* Only those who let the Holy Spirit work in them. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, the Apostle Paul says: ***14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.***

This, too, is a hard teaching – or maybe I should say, "A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK!" I ask again – *who can accept Christ? Who can believe in Him and in His words?* The answer is clear – only those who let the Holy Spirit work in them – only those who let the Holy Spirit enable them. The Holy Spirit, working through the means of grace – that is working through God's Word and Baptism and Holy Communion – enables us to believe in Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to hold out an empty hand and allow our Lord to put his most precious blessings there. So, when all is said and done, at the end of the day, He gets all the credit

for our salvation. In John 6:61, we read: ⁶¹***But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"***

The majority turned and walked away. They forfeited God's blessings – in this life, and in the next. Most of the people that day, when they came to the crossroads of faith, turned down the fork in the road that led away from Jesus, away from faith, and away from His rich blessings. In John 6:67, ⁶⁷***So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?"*** It's as if Jesus is saying to His disciples, *"Well, what about you gentlemen? You've been with me for quite a while now. What are you going to do? Are you going to leave me, as these people have just done? Or will you stay?"*

Peter spoke for all the disciples saying: ⁶⁸***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*** It's as if Peter is saying, "There's nowhere else we can go, Lord. You have the words of eternal life, Jesus. We know that. We believe that. We are convinced that you are the Messiah – the Holy One of God. These others – the ones who have left – don't believe that."

So, who is this Jesus, anyway? Did he really die on the cross for your sins and mine? Was he really raised from the dead? Does God, in fact, declare us forgiven because of what His son has done for us? Jesus told the grumblers that "the Spirit gives life." In other words, the Holy Spirit enables us to understand spiritual truth. A wise Christian once said that if we want to be blessed by God we must **"LET GO AND LET HIM BLESS US."** Faith is God's gift. It's not our own doing. As the Holy Spirit works, through God's Word and the Sacraments, God draws us to himself, like a magnet, if we will let him. We dare not boast about it. We dare not be self-righteous. Salvation is not a human achievement. **It is the gracious gift of a gracious God.**

There's much to offend people here in John 6. A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK, INDEED! Words about eating at Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood. Words claiming that Jesus is equal to the Father. Words about believing in Jesus– in Jesus alone – for salvation! Many people that day were "offended" by Jesus' words – It was a scandal. In Christian circles, a scandal could be an obstacle that causes someone to fall. In our world, a growing number of people are "offended" by the Gospel. Amazingly, the very same Word that brings salvation to some brings offence to others. The same Word of God that brings salvation to some causes others to be hardened in their unbelief.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to grumble about things? If we don't watch ourselves, it can become a habit. Consider this little poem:

***In country, town, or city, some people can be found
who spend their lives in grumbling – at everything around.
Oh, yes, they always grumble, no matter what we say,
for these are chronic grumblers, and they grumble night and day.
They grumble in the city. They grumble on the farm.
They grumble at their neighbors. They think it is no harm.
They grumble at their husbands. They grumble at their wives.
They grumble at their children. But the grumbler never thrives.
They grumble when it raining, they grumble when it's dry...
And if the crops are failing, they grumble and they sigh.
They grumble at the prices, and they grumble when they slide...
They grumble all the year around. And they grumble 'till they die.***

The very same Word of God that can spark faith in a human heart can also cause a heart to be hardened, just like the same sun that causes a seed to sprout can also bake mud into bricks. Behold the son of man. He came down from heaven. He preached and taught the truth. He loved and encouraged everyone. He bled and died on the cross. And he was resurrected from the dead. Behold, the son of man. Jesus of Nazareth. To know him is to have life. Amen.