

To Be or Not To Be

August 26, 2012

John 6: 56-69

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. 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."

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune...

No, don't worry, I'm not going to stand up here this morning and attempt to be a Shakespearian actor. The line just worked with what I felt was the theme of today's message. Hamlet delivers these lines on his entry to Act 3 scene 1 in Shakespeare's play by the same name, Hamlet. It is probably one of the most quoted lines in any of Shakespeare's plays. Yet there seems to be a cloud over the actual meaning of the lines and even the meaning of the entire soliloquy. Those lines can be so vague, you could apply them to a lot of situations. I think possibly the first six words are an excellent question for us concerning Christianity, to be or not to be. Should I be a Christian, or should I not be a Christian? And with that same thought in mind, could that be what Jesus was asking some 1600 years before Shakespeare penned these lines when he said in verse 67 **"You do not want to leave too, do you?"** Or in other words, Do you want to be with me or not to be with me? Jesus has been teaching a hard lesson. Jesus has been trying to tell the people here is who I am, and if you want eternal life, here is what you must do. In verse 61 we read, **Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"** We talked last week about Jesus being in their face with eat my flesh and drink my blood. This morning new are continuing with that same message. If you want eternal life, here is what you have to do. For most of his disciples, this lesson was just too much to comprehend or too much to do. In verse 66 we read, **From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.** I spoke about this briefly last week.

What Jesus is saying in this sixth chapter of John is that we must make a commitment to him. We must believe in him and believe He was sent by God. Listen to verse 40: **For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.** Verse 41: **I am the bread that came down from heaven.** Verse 54: **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life.** Here it is, here is what you have to do. Like I said last week, no if's ands, or buts. This is it. Here is what you have to do.

OK, now we know what we have to do, so, what's stopping us. What is hindering us from making that commitment to Jesus? Could it be some of the teachings of Christ? That is part of what is going on in today's

scripture lesson. Eat my flesh, drink my blood. Most of the people who were following Jesus heard this and didn't feel that they could do what He was asking them to do. Taking Him literally, they just couldn't do what he asked. So they left; they no longer felt they could follow Christ.

Which one of His teachings is an obstacle or a stumbling block to you following Jesus? Let's check out a few. Love thy neighbor. The guy living next-door to me, how in the world am I supposed to love that guy? Over the years, some of us have had some real doozies. I can see the look on some of your faces and tell you have had some real winners. Yet, others of you smiled that smile of true love because you have indeed had that one-in-a-million neighbor that you thought was just the very best. Yet, Jesus wasn't just talking about the people who just lived next door to you. No, He was talking about everyone. Wow, loving everyone; umm, not so sure about that one are we? OK, let's look at another of Jesus' teachings: how about the rich young ruler. He asked Jesus what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus' reply was to sell everything and give it to the poor, then come and follow Him. The rich young ruler just couldn't do that. How many of us are willing to sell everything we have and give the money to the poor? Vicki and I were talking about this Wednesday afternoon. My response to her was that I have worked for 49 years to get what I have today. I'm not real sure how much I'd be willing to sell and just give away. How about you, how much are you willing to sell? Christ said sell it all. Let's look at another one. Turn the other cheek. I remember as a child, I was a literalist about this one. I thought it meant that if you got slapped, to let the person slap the other side of our face too. I had a problem with that. I think most of us have a problem there too. Someone does you wrong, then, I'm supposed to let them do the same thing to me again? Really! I don't think so. Habit 5 of Steven Covey's 7-Habits of Highly Effective People is "Seek first to understand, Then be understood." Maybe if Jesus had said it that way it would have made it a little easier to take. Maybe we wouldn't have as much of a problem with that one.

As you can see, we all have stumbling blocks that hinder our worship, that hinder our relationship with Jesus Christ. I think we have all heard someone, possibly even we have said, "How can a good and loving God let such horrible things happen?" What types of horrible things could we be talking about? Let's list just a few: disease, accidents, natural disasters, starvation, war, drought, famine, human trafficking, abuse. I think I'll stop there. We all know the list could go on and on. Each one of us has some type of stumbling block. Sometimes things just happen. I've seen children die, and families leave the church because "God let it happen". Is one of your stumbling blocks that God let something bad happen? Does God really let bad things happen? Personally, I feel that God "lets" anything happen, however, when the bad things do happen, that is when we need God the most. That is when we need God to help us center our lives. That is when we need a strong God to lean on.

One of the ongoing conversations we have here at HMCC is how do we get more people to come to church. We always hear that we are such a warm and friendly place. If we can just get someone here, we can keep them. Just get to know us. Here's a question for you; is it possible that non-believers are seeing us as a stumbling block. On Sunday morning, sitting here in this sanctuary, we are all good Christians. However, are we doing things away from church in our day-to-day lives to make the non-believer say if that's Christianity, then I don't need any part of it. Let me give you an extreme example. I used to work with a gentleman who goes to another church. He is a fine man, a good solid Christian. He's very active in his church and very well thought of there. He may even be a deacon. The guys at work know how to push his buttons though. They would tell him they were going to send a black man to his church. They said they were going to send a black to worship service on Sunday morning and ask him to sit on the front row. That's all it took to set this man off. There's no black going to come to my church. We don't allow them in my church. If they want to go to church let them go to their own church. The guys at work took great delight in getting this man cranked up. And that

was all it took. Yet, he is very active in his church and considers himself a very devout Christian. He can quote scripture; he enjoys discussing religion; I've watched him very quietly bow his head and bless his food before he eats lunch. He does the things you would think a Christian would do in public, right? But let one non-believer walk by as he is going off about a black man attending his church... If that's Christianity, do I want to be a Christian? As I started this segment, I told you this was an extreme example, and it is, but it's a true example. Now, how about some of the less extreme examples; do you ever gossip, or spread rumors about people. You may not really mean anything bad by it, but are you setting a Christian example? Do you brag how the clerk charged you the wrong price and you got away with an extra \$5.00 or do you correct the mistake and pay the correct amount. Anyone ever give you too much change and you bragged about it later? Do you brag about the good deeds you have done, or just do them because it's the right thing to do whether you get the recognition or not. Is your life away from church the sermon a non-believer can see, or are your daily actions that stumbling block that will keep them from coming to our church or any church?

Listen to verses 67 thru 69: **“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. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”** Jesus is the one to go to. Jesus is the one to place your faith and trust in. Peter knew the answer. The twelve knew the answer, they knew where to go. They may not have totally understood Jesus' comments concerning his flesh and his blood, yet, they understood that through belief in Jesus Christ they would each gain eternal life with the Father.

The story goes that a man had bought an old 30-foot wooden sailboat. He spent several years restoring the boat to an almost new appearance. Finally, the day came for the maiden voyage. The man took his teenage son and one of his son's friends on the trip. They had spent most of the day having a grand time. It was late afternoon and they were in the middle of the sound when a terrible afternoon storm came up from nowhere. Fearing the worst, the man could only find one life jacket. He made his son's friend put on the life jacket. Shortly after the boy put the life jacket on, a huge wave hit the boat crushing it to pieces. The next morning, the Coast Guard found the wreck. They pulled the boy out of the water with his life jacket on and found the father desperately clinging to the boat's wooden mast. After several hours they found the lifeless body of the man's son. After the funeral, the boy walked up to his dead friend's father and asked him why did you give me the life jacket instead of giving it to your son. The man replied, I knew my son had given his life to Jesus Christ. I knew that if the worst happened, my son had already been saved. I didn't know about you.

To be or not to be, that is the question.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.