

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, August 25th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Bread of Life (3)
Proper 16
John 6: 60-71

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

With all our hearts, let us praise the Lord.
With all that we are, we will praise God's holy name!

With all our hearts, let us bless the Lord.
We will never forget how kind God has been.

The Lord forgives our sins, heals our weakness, and gives us life everlasting.
Let us worship God who is merciful and patient, God's love never fails.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

O God, our strength and refuge,
We come together to worship you and praise your loving kindness.
In your presence, we rest from what distracts us,
to focus on your truth and goodness.
You call us to live in relationship with you.
Through the love of Jesus Christ, you repair our lives.
Through the power of your Spirit, you engage us to serve you in the world.
Receive our prayers and our praise this day,
Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
revive our hope and our energy
and make us ready to answer your call. **Amen.**

Baby Dedication

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

O God, our judge and our hope,
we confess we often turn away from your truth,
and ignore your call to do justice.
Forgive us when we say one thing in worship
but do another in the ways we live.
Forgive us when we ignore how others are treated
and think only of ourselves.
Let your judgment awaken us and your mercy refresh us.

Assurance of Pardon

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Believe the good news of the Gospel.
In Christ, God has offered us mercy and love.
Receive God's forgiveness this day
and share it with each other for Christ's sake.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn**Responsive Reading****Psalm 84: 1-4**

¹ **How lovely is your dwelling place,**

O Lord of hosts!

² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ **Even the sparrow finds a home,**

and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may lay her young,
 at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
 my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
 ever singing your praise! *Selah*

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

John 6:60-71

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." ⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Sermon

When you look into the world of marketing and advertising you discover that the whole industry is built upon selling an image and not a product. This is why branding is so important, companies will spend more time designing and discussing logos, vision statements and direction, than in ensuring the quality of their service or product. The reason that they do this is simple, it works. Many people out there buy products, get services, go to restaurants, not because of the quality of service or product but because of the name brand.

The crowd that was following Jesus around the sea of Galilee was more interested in the miracles he was performing, in being fed, in his rebuking of the elite, in feeling like they were part of something special than in listening to and adhering to his teachings.

And here we are two thousand years later experiencing the same issue in our churches. Many modern-day church goers are more motivated by excitement and entertainment than by God's Word. The Word of God is challenging and difficult to digest, so people look instead for entertainment, proving that many who call themselves Christians in the modern world are the spiritual descendants of those same people who were following Jesus for all of the wrong reasons.

Worse yet this seems to be the direction that many churches and denominations are moving in, selling the show and not the word. Contemporary church growth experts promote techniques that they guarantee will grow a congregation using entertainment. Many churches are looking for leaders who will grow their congregation without a care about how they teach the Scripture.

In many places, solid biblical pastors are released or fired from their congregations because congregational growth is more important to the congregation than spiritual growth. What is most important to the average church goer is a short, exciting, feel-good service; something that makes them feel safe and secure in their salvation, and pastors are expected to deliver what their audience wants, even if that means veering away from the Word of God.

It is not new, look at what the crowds gathered around Jesus said.

John 6:60

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

The crowd no longer wants to listen to Jesus. Remember that this is the same crowd that just a day earlier were calling for Jesus to be made their king after he filled their bellies with fish and bread. This is the same crowd that rallied around him when he chastised the religious leaders for their self-absorbed ways. The same crowd that had sought him out so that they could be healed. The same crowd that had followed him across the sea of Galilee into Capernaum.

So, what could Jesus have possibly said to make these people who were willing to go to such lengths to find him, suddenly shift their opinion of him to the point that they no longer wanted to even listen to him. What were the words that he spoke that caused such offense.

John 6:29

²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

This crowd gathered there felt very much like the rich young man who had confronted Jesus about his salvation in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 19:16-22

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

When the crowd was told that they needed to change. That they needed to not just like and admire Jesus's teachings but actually make them part of their lives, changing who they are and how they live it was too much for them. So, they revolt against him, saying that they can no longer listen to him speak.

What makes this startling, is that we need to remember these people were his followers. They are people who had been committed to him, following him as he wandered the region performing miracles, healing people, and teaching the Word of God. However, now that the truth of what it means to be a true follower of His comes to light, the fact that they have to give up their own selfish and self-centered ways and let the Word of God guide their lives, it is more than they can handle. They were more than willing to identify themselves as an ally, to walk alongside him, but there was no way that they would actually humble themselves and submit their lives into God's hands.

The tie to the modern church could not be made any clearer. There are many church goers, professing Christians, who are quite comfortable going to church, they might even tithe once in a while. They never miss the CEO dates, Christmas, Easter and Other major events. They think like many others the church is form hatching, matching and dispatching. Yet when the pastor talks about what it means to be a true follower of the Lord, they are unwilling to give up the sins and pleasures that they enjoy so much in their lives.

Jesus challenges us all to invest our selves into him, to ingest the bread of live and drink his blood. This call to be a true Christian is a divisive call, one that sets us apart from those around us in this world. God requires us to be serious about our faith. Willing to humbly submit to God's Word even if it means we suffer in this world. Even if it means we face discrimination and persecution, even when it costs us socially and financially, even when it costs us personally in our lives.

The crowd was offended by the words of Christ because they required a sacrifice. They wanted to be entertained and made to feel better about themselves not told that they should change in some way.

The same is true of the world today, many people when they come to a good Bible believing and preaching church, choose to go elsewhere because the Pastor is too Biblical, or too evangelical, too orthodox, too traditional. They believe that the pastor or the church needs to catch up with the times. So, they leave the church to go find one that better matches their vision of who God and the Bible should be.

This should not be surprising to a Christian. The Bible tells us that Satan will trick many people, that his servants will tickle the ears of those who seek out false teachings. When we look at the rise of mega churches and famous pastors that has become what the church is known for in the world around us, we see the truth of the Scripture coming to life. People who are only willing to follow their own version of the Gospel, because the true teachings of the Scripture are hard to listen too, and who can obey them?

Yet it is the Word of God that is required to create true faith. The Word of God is meant to be challenging, it is meant to offend you, to make you uncomfortable. Our faith is in the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, and it instructs us on how we are called to live, often pointing out the ways in which we sin in our lives, and while we may not agree with them at first, eventually every true believer will be convicted in the reality of their sin and repent before the Lord.

In Romans Paul wrote

Romans 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

It is faith in Christ alone that saves people. He is the one and only path to eternal life. Paul, however, does not finish there.

Romans 10: 14-17

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

It is the Word of God that calls us to salvation, not being entertained, not being well fed, not being made to feel good about ourselves. It is the Word of God truthfully shared, even when it causes discomfort and offense that bring people to the Lord, regardless of who a person is or was.

The Word of God truthfully proclaimed does not cause anyone to lose faith, however, the Word of God does expose the superficial faith of sinners that have a false relationship with the Lord. The Word of God causes discomfort and offends the natural heart of mankind because it exposes the truth that we have ourselves seated in the throne of our life. It is the Word of God that exposes to the lost that God is in truth not an influence in their lives.

The Word of God exposes the chains of greed and lust and the sinful are angered because their sin is no longer hidden. And rather than seeking the freedom from sin that the Lord offers, they rage against the light of the Lord.

John 3:19-21

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

This is why Jesus turns from the crowd and looks to his disciples.

John 6:61

⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?”

He turns to them and checks their commitment. He is telling them here is your way out, leave not or make the commitment to be faithful and follow. Make your choice.

People who face the reality of the hard teaching of the Scripture respond in two ways, depending on who sits on the throne in their lives.

Those who have placed themselves on the throne, whether in the form of personal comfort, or personal advancement or exhalation, will be deeply offended by the teachings.

Those who have placed Jesus on the throne of their lives, will hear the exact same difficult teaching, and incorporate it into their lives, humbling themselves to the master.

Jesus is teaching his disciples and us today that our relationship is with God, and he must be the focus, the center of our lives. Of course, this offends people who were seeking to serve their own purposes. Jesus is seeking followers who are willing to humble themselves through serving

others. Truthfully, many of the people that Jesus's followers are called to serve have nothing to offer; in fact, they can often be abrasive or offensive in their conduct.

Jesus turned the understanding of the world upside down in his teachings, teaching that we become great not by rising to power, wealth and fame in this world, but instead by humbling ourselves and serving others. And when this teaching is brought into the modern church and people are asked to serve, it often offends those who have seated themselves on the throne of life, almost always these people will find themselves leaving for another church which better fulfills their calling.

It is hard when we see people leave the church for somewhere else, it hurts, but we should not be surprised when it happens. The Word of God is offensive to false believers.

1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

People will leave because they were never true believers, and when the Word of God becomes uncomfortable, offensive and difficult for them they will choose to leave rather than be changed. They will go to churches that tell them what they want to hear.

Acts 20:28-30

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The modern church is filled with believers and churchgoers, and these two factions are often in disagreement with one another. It is not a new phenomenon, it existed in the earliest churches. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth.

1 Corinthians 11:17-19

¹⁷ But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

The way that we respond to these divisions around the Word of God exposes the truth of who we follow.

If God sits on the throne of life, a person, humbly submits themselves to the Word of God, even at a cost to self.

If self sits on the throne, the person responds with anger to those who disagree with them, seeking to remove their opponent in any way which they can. They often seek to create further division. They will cease to participate in church events, or even the church itself, they will threaten to withdraw support, or prayer. This exposes their true nature, they are self-interested, because they want church to be their way. Perceptive church goers will recognize that they were always that way and allow the master to do his work in removing them from the church, pruning the vine as the vine master is called to do.

God's Word is exclusive, it is divisive, it is challenging, it is offensive, and it is the only way to salvation.

Could you imagine if modern day church growth experts had been there in Capernaum to advise Jesus on the day he said this to the crowds.

I imagine they would have said this:

- You need to make the message exciting.
- You need a little more excitement and humor in your sermons.
- How about a different praise band, hymns are boring do something more upbeat.
- You need to be more stylish in their dress.
- You need to get with the times, stop clinging to the ways of the past.
- You must quite insulting people by demanding that they change.
- You'll need to make people feel better about themselves not worse.

This is exactly the opposite of what the Word of God teaches. If Jesus took this advice or we took this advice, we are just obeying the wishes of Satan.

Matthew 4:8-10

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

" 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' "

Satan is worried about filling his churches with crowds, Jesus is concerned with the faithful. He is separating the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goat.

Jesus did not come to make us better people in this world alone, he came to redeem us from our sin. When we eat the bread of life we are transformed, slowly from who we were into who

we are called to be in this world. The process takes a lifetime, but it is a thorough process, one in which our sins are brought to light, and we learn to acknowledge and repent of them. One in which we are tested and refined constantly, as long as we Keep the Lord on the throne of our lives.

Romans 12:1-2

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So let us seek out God in all things, let us allow him to sit upon the throne of our lives, allow his Word to challenge us, to make us uncomfortable, to offend us and to change us as we walk as the Salt and Light of God's Word in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

For Grace By Augustine of Hippo

We ask not of you, O Father,
 silver and gold,
 honor and glory,
 nor the pleasures of the world.
 Grant us grace to seek your Kingdom
 and your righteousness,
 and give us what we need for body and life.
 Behold, O Lord, our desire.
 May it be pleasing in your sight.
 We present our petition to you through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 who is at your right hand,
 our mediator and Advocate,
 through whom you sought us that we might seek you;
 your Word, through whom you made us and all things;
 your only Son, through whom you call us to adoption,
 who intercedes with you for us,
 and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;
 to him, with you and the Holy Spirit,
 be all honor, praise, and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn

Invitation to Offering**Offering****Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn****Pastoral Prayer**

Loving God, gather us into your presence as we pray.
 Silence our hearts and minds in these moments
 so that we may listen for the movement of your Holy Spirit
 who prays within us through our sighs too deep for words.

O God, we lay before you our thanks and our concerns
 as we remember those who have come to our attention through conversations
 or chance encounters this week.
 We offer gratitude for moments of joy and goodness,
 and remembered pleasures stirred by your Spirit;

We remember all those whose situations are very close to our hearts today,
 those facing stress or sorrow,
 those challenged by pain or illness,
 those making a new beginning or searching for a new path.

We remember the things in the news lately that concern us deeply:
 the stress on the environment and worries about its future,
 the pressures on those who have lost jobs or cannot find work,
 tensions among nations who threaten each other
 And we remember one another and needs known and unknown in this community.

Bless us as we make a new beginning together as summer turns to autumn.
 Show us the paths of ministry you are opening before us.
 We believe you hear our prayers and will be faithful to answer according to your will.
 We pray these words in the name of Jesus Christ, our lord and savior,
 Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
 As the one true God now and forever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love for you,
and keep you in his peace.

May you receive strength
to grow in faith, hope, and love,
to live with joy and delight,
and to give God thanks and praise. **Amen.**