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Pentecost XIII & Proper 15  
August 18, 2024  
John 6:51 – 69  
Title: Lord To Whom Shall We Go?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Our text for today's sermon is the Gospel lesson from John 6, which was read a few minutes ago.

Jesus said, "Do you take offense at this? I am the way and the truth and the life."

I just don't know if I can believe what you're saying. How can a God who is supposed to be so loving say that the *only* way to get to heaven is through Jesus Christ? All religions are basically the same, right? "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Jesus said, "Do you take offense at this? None is righteous, no not one."

I'm sure that I'm going to go to heaven. After all, I'm a good person. I don't steal from anyone. I don't hurt anyone with what I do, and I always try to be nice. I don't need to go to church because I can worship God better on my own in my cabin. "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Jesus said, "Do you take offense at this? Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement."

I know that I shouldn't hate anyone, but he *really* hurt me! He cheated me out of a raise at work, and fixed it so that the boss is constantly looking over my shoulder! He's just a nasty person, and I'm supposed to pray for him because he's my enemy? Not a chance! "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Jesus said, "Do you take offense at this? You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Oh come on! Just because I told Tracy that John was cheating on his wife even though he wasn't doesn't make me a bad person! I heard it from Tom, and I thought that he would

know because he's their neighbor! It was just a little harmless gossip! "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

The sentiment behind those words – "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" – has been at the center of our response to our Creator ever since the fall into sin by Adam and Eve. At that time, all of us fell under the Law of God, and we became slaves to sin.

As a result of our slavery to sin we constantly find ourselves second guessing God, and trying to get around His Laws. We become offended by the idea that we are subject to His will, and that we owe Him everything that we have including our very existence. After all, it's *my* life. It's *my* body, and what I do with it is *my* choice!

Our sinful nature infects us in the very same way as a disease. It corrupts us, and as a result we are more likely to put our own reasoning and will before God. We fool ourselves into thinking that we know better than He does, and we ignore what he wants for us because we want what we want. In short, we are in a state of open rebellion against God and His rule.

The worst part is that we're so used to sinning that we don't even realize that we're doing it most of the time. Think about it for a minute. What's something that you do to break the commandments that you hardly even notice doing because it's so easy or you do it so often? How about misusing God's name? Do you ever violate that one? I know I do. It's really easy to get frustrated with someone or something, and just blurt out, "Oh *God!*" Unfortunately we might even add another word after that which I'll just let you add for yourself.

The toughest part is that even when you don't actually say it, you still break the commandment because as we all know, "It's the thought that counts!" That even applies to the Laws that we think that we keep perfectly every time such as, "You shall not murder." I know that I've never committed the act of murder anytime in my life. That means that I've kept this commandment, right? Of course, I'm wrong there too.

As Jesus says, hate brings you under judgment, and I know that you've all had hateful thoughts at some point in your life. Whether it's against your brother, sister, a parent or that fool that cut you off on the way to the store the other day! In fact, even insulting someone breaks God's commandment according to Matthew 5.

We even find ourselves breaking God's Laws and rebelling against Him when we *don't* do something! We call those sins of omission. Remember back to your catechism and the meanings of the Ten Commandments. Let's take one that seems relatively easy, like the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment. What is it? "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." And the meaning is that, "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."

It's the part after the word "but" that really accuses us, especially when it says that we should "explain everything in the kindest way." Let's face it; it's definitely easier to be suspicious about a neighbor's intentions than to assume that that person is just being nice. If someone does something nice for us, don't we almost immediately wonder what they want? Is that explaining "everything in the kindest way?" I don't think so.

"These are hard sayings; who can listen to them?"

The Law is never easy for us to hear, even when we've heard it all before. The Law cuts us deep down to our soul, and challenges the way that we think that things should be! The disciples who left Jesus because of the offense of His words found His demands and teachings to be foolish and harsh. In the earlier verses of this reading He tells them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood to be a part of Him. Given those words is it any wonder that they would second guess their following of this Messiah? Add what sounds close to cannibalism to

the idea of living forever, and you had the perfect excuse to stop following Jesus. It sounds like nonsense doesn't it?

Jesus makes the situation harder still for these disciples by challenging them with words that refer to His ascending to where He was before. He had already confused them by saying that He came down from heaven when they knew that He came from Joseph's house. *Now*, He's saying that he'll return there, and that they can only have life and spirit by the words that He speaks! Who does this Jesus think that He is, anyway? How can He demand such things?

Do you notice that there is no middle ground with Him? Jesus doesn't give them or us the chance to wait and see what He'll be like. You either belong to Him or you do not. You either believe in Him and His word, or you do not. There is no gray area here. "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

It is the twelve apostles who remain behind here, and it is their response to Jesus that gives us hope in the face of these hard sayings. He challenges them with going or staying, and Peter responds with great words of faith, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God!"

Did you catch those wonderful words? We sang them just before the Gospel reading a few minutes ago. They introduced the Gospel reading for us after we added the word of praise "Alleluia" because what we are hearing in the words of the Gospel are words to *rejoice* over! They are the "words of eternal life!" Through the Good News of Christ we believe and acknowledge with Peter and the other apostles that His Words are the "words of eternal life!"

We have all seen that what Peter said was truly inspired! Who else can we turn to for forgiveness? Who else can we turn to for eternal life? Who else can we turn to so that we may live a life that is pleasing to Him? There is no one else, but our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Son of God. His Words will bring to us eternal life.

They are words that will give you everything that you can ever hope for and need; words of comfort, hope, joy, forgiveness and strength. They are good for teaching, rebuking and training us to live a life that is pleasing to Him. His words change the lives of those who hear them and believe, and they have changed our life by ending our rebellion and saving us from eternal death!

And when do we hear such powerful words? We hear these powerful words whenever we hear the Gospel read, “You have the words of eternal life.” We hear these powerful words whenever a pastor forgives our sins with the words, “I forgive your sins in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We hear them whenever the words of institution are spoken over the bread and wine in Holy Communion, “...given for you for the forgiveness of sins.” We hear these wonderful, powerful words of eternal life whenever we witness another soul washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism! “Almighty God...has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins!”

These words change lives. Because of them we no longer live as slaves to sin, but live a life that is free under the Gospel. We listen to the Law of God, and He helps us day by day to become Holy in His sight. As we grow in our faith and life through reading and studying His words of eternal life and worshiping Him and regularly receiving His sacrament, we begin to show the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control and faithfulness. The Spirit teaches us the ways of holiness, and we become ever stronger in our faith toward Him. May His work continue in you until you are called home by His “words of eternal life.” Alleluia. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen