

"Shocking"

Text: John 6:56-69

"Now may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, is anyone else growing weary of advertising that labels pretty much anything and everything as "Shocking!"? I now know, for example, "The shocking truth about Twinkies" – which turns out to be that they're not all that good for you. Whoa.

The Weather Channel web site uses this sort of thing shamelessly. On a site where you are pretty much just looking for, well, *the weather*, they fill half of each page with videos with titles like "When he looked behind the door, what he found was truly shocking." Teases you, doesn't it? You want to know what's behind the door, except that after suffering through a 30-second ad you find out it was something like a bagel that some guy thought looked like Nancy Pelosi.

The result is inevitably that we come to expect that the word "shocking" has come to mean pretty much nothing at all – that it's used just as a ploy or gimmick to get our attention. The problem with *that* is that some things actually *are* shocking, but often only if we actually take the time to think about them.

To this end I'm not sure that those of us who now live in 21st Century America can possibly appreciate how shockingly world-changing and radically different was both the coming and subsequent teaching of Jesus Christ. We seem to have this natural assumption that things were then much as they are now. Oh we know they didn't have electricity, gas-powered engines, or Twinkies, but there is no way we can really appreciate how radically different were the thoughts and beliefs and superstitions of people in Jesus' day – which is why we often hear that those who listened to Jesus were absolutely amazed – shocked – by what Jesus said. To our ears today his words sound right, normal, even obvious at times, yet that very acceptance represents a gift that we've been given, and our almost casual acceptance wasn't the common reaction of those who first heard his words. There was a reason for that. A lost, condemned, perverted world cannot simply be cleaned up a bit and thereby made acceptable in the sight of God. It had to be radically transformed. It had to be shocked from its lethargic apathy if they were to have any hope of listening to Jesus' message of eternal life by grace through faith. Jesus came to do exactly that.

This morning's text is an example of that very thing, an example of how Jesus – with divine wisdom and in a most calculated way – sought to shock the people of his day from their spiritual stupor. Our text for this morning is found recorded in the Sixth Chapter of John's Gospel:

ESV John 6:56-69 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. 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."

This is God's Word, generously and miraculously recorded and preserved for mankind down to this very moment. That you and I might gain the full benefit that God himself intended for us through the study of these words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Let me give you just one example of how the things that Jesus said and did were seen and received differently back in his day. When we today read how Jesus fed first the 5000 and then the 4000, there is almost no way that we can appreciate what a big deal that was for the people back then. Today when we think "food" we think supermarkets, modern kitchens, electric appliances, refrigeration, and so on. Today the average American spends almost no time at all on food production, and many spend almost no time on food preparation. Back in Jesus' day – in fact up until relatively recently – life pretty much revolved

around getting enough food to eat. Where today we take for granted the incredible food production and supply system that we have in place, in Jesus' day starvation was never far from the peoples' minds. To stop working was to starve. Given that background, now consider again Jesus' feeding of the five and four thousand and recognize that a similar disconnect often threatens our full understanding or appreciation of other parts of God's Word. This does not necessarily indicate false doctrine or unbelief, but a lack of depth and insight.

This brings us to our text for this morning. You and I have pretty much grown up with the concept of eating Jesus' true body and blood. We are not therefore repulsed by the opening lines of our text where we hear Jesus saying, **"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."** Don't misunderstand. Jesus is not talking about Holy Communion here – more on that in a minute – but the very fact that we have grown up with Holy Communion makes us hear Jesus' words differently.

In Jesus' day the natural course the human mind would take upon hearing such words was cannibalism, and the people were understandably uncomfortable with the thought. Yet Jesus obviously knew his people and therefore knew what they would think when they heard his words. In fact we are told in this very text that he had in fact read their minds. The key question we therefore need to ask ourselves is: *Why then did he say what he did? Why did he say something that he knew for a fact would prove to be such a negative or repulsive thing for those who heard?*

You heard their reaction, by the way, in our text: **When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"** Yet here again, in part because we are so far removed from the original language, we need to work a bit harder to hear the words *as did the people back then*. Take, for example, the word the word above translated "hard." To "hear" that word more like the people back then did, think old, dried out, non-pliable boot leather or old horse tack that has been hanging on the wall of a dilapidated barn for about 50 years. The picture is of something disagreeably non-pliable.

The point is that what the people wanted from Jesus were smooth, comfortable thoughts and words – words that conformed to (and therefore also confirmed) what they thought and believed when they first came to him. They didn't want change; they wanted reaffirmation of their existing beliefs. They were, in other words, both stubborn and arrogant in their unbelief. Thus Jesus' words were something akin to hugging an armful of old, dried up raspberry plants. The people found it most unpleasant. So,

again, why did Jesus do it? Why address them with words he knew would cause them such discomfort and sound so disagreeable?

The answer, of course, is that he recognized their unbelief. He knew that they had to be turned from the path they were on or they would be lost eternally. Carry that thought forward and you see the problem whenever religious leaders today offer their people exactly what Jesus refused to give them. The world's answer to sin and unbelief is more or less spiritual hospice care. They no longer seek to cure the problem; they are only interested in making the person spiritually comfortable with their unbelief and sin.

Jesus' words to them were designed to be shocking, which is obviously exactly what they were. As mentioned earlier, Jesus was probably not referring here to the Lord's Supper. He was referring to believing in him wholeheartedly; making him and his word not only a *part* of our lives but the focus of our existence. We know this to be true for several reasons. First, because the Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted. Second, because the reception of Holy Communion is not necessary for salvation, finally, because not everyone who communes goes to heaven. Contrast this with what Jesus said in our text, **"so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."** Jesus calls himself the "bread of life." Again his words: **"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."**

Jesus is here contrasting a superficial following with true, saving faith. Many of Jesus' followers were living a lie. They didn't really believe in Jesus. Not really. They were amazed by him. They were content to be led and fed by him. They were living on the cutting edge of the latest thing. But they didn't really *believe* in him. They followed him, but for all the wrong reasons. Jesus recognized that they had to be shaken from their spiritual sleep or they would be lost eternally, and his words were designed to do just that.

But didn't his words seem to have exactly the opposite effect? Didn't his words drive souls away rather than draw them in? No, they didn't. Jesus' words didn't drive the unbelievers away; his words just revealed the unbelief that already existed. Jesus refused to let them die in their spiritual sleep. Those that remained with Jesus were undoubtedly also shocked and probably also repulsed by the thought of eating Jesus' flesh. Yet his words did not drive them away. Is it possible that they too wanted to turn away? Sure. There is something in each of us that wants to follow the crowd and wants desperately to be seen as

"normal." When the believing disciples heard Jesus' words and saw the masses moving away, their conflict must have been profound.

What followed was an intensely interesting conversation between them and their Savior. **"So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'"** The honest answer from the Twelve – at least according to their old Adam or sinful flesh? *"Yeah, kinda."* Why didn't they? They believed. They recognized Jesus for who he was and what he came to do. So also their answer: **"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."** The Holy Spirit had not only brought these men to faith, it was also that same Holy Spirit who was living in them and giving them, among other things, the patience to hear and learn more from Jesus. Don't assume that the 12 fully understood what Jesus was saying here. Assume they did not. Yet they were willing to be instructed. They trusted the Source of these words, so in humility they waited for him to explain. They waited for Jesus to raise them to that higher spiritual walk or existence. This is some of the "wisdom" that we heard about in our Old Testament lesson that is tied up with – and cannot exist without – the fear of the Lord. So also Peter's answer: *"Where would we go? You are God."*

Jesus was offering the unbelievers (who were following him with their feet) exactly what they needed to also follow him with their hearts. They rejected it – even in the face of the shockingly conclusive evidence that Jesus was giving them. Recognize that same inclination in your own sinful flesh – the natural desire to reject what you cannot explain, to "move with the crowd," and to be seen by society as "normal." Recognize the natural arrogance in your own heart that tells you that whatever God does or allows must conform to *your* thoughts and ideas, rather than yours to God. Know too that the simple truths of God's Word will continue to sound ever more shocking and disagreeable as the world around you ever more decisively rejects God's truth.

Then thrill to the equally shocking ramifications of what this text really tells us when it says: **"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."** Saving faith has to *be created* in the unbeliever by the Holy Spirit – which means that *you have been chosen*. That's the gift you have been given because the Holy Spirit has already drawn you into his kingdom. The Words that came from your God did not push you away; the Holy Spirit used (and still uses) those words to draw you ever closer. Your flesh is no help at all in this, as it was no help for the 12. Yet even if their flesh wanted them to leave, their Lord held them in his hand and preserved them in their saving faith. He has done and will do the same for you and me. He has created

saving faith in our hearts and has claimed us as his children and heirs of eternal life. Having forgiven our sins on the basis of what his Son did for us, he even now cares for and protects us day by day, moment by moment.

And here's the most shocking part of all of this: God has worked his miracle of saving faith in us and has continued to preserve us in that same state of grace not because we were in any way better, but *despite* the fact that we were in every way just as bad, just as undeserving, as everyone else.

Each time then that Satan tries to detour you from the path to life eternal, each time he tries to convince you that there is another more reasonable, more agreeable, more logical path to heaven, your answer, your reply, has been provided by our Savior: *Where else could we go? We have, even now, the gift of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus.* "We have been given the very best. How absolutely shocking to think that we could ever want anything different. Amen.

ESV **Proverbs 9:1-10** Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars.
2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town,
4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says,
5 "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."
7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.
8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.
9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

ESV **Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18** Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.
2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.
15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."
16 ¶ Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods,
17 for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.
18 And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

ESV **John 6:56-69** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.
57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.
58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."
59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.
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."



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost – August 15, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 536 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Proverbs 9:1-10) Many things in life are passed off as "wise." Unless it comes from God, Christians are right to be skeptical. Our first reading this morning not only comes from God, it talks about wisdom itself. The basic immutable truth provided by this reading is that true wisdom is simply not possible for anyone who rejects the One True God, who is source of all truth.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18) Though man does not have the power to bring himself to faith, he does have the terrible power to destroy the faith created in him by God the Holy Spirit. So too in our second reading Joshua does not call on the Children of Israel to bring themselves to faith, he calls on them to recommit themselves to the faith that has been given to them. We today would do well to recommit ourselves to our Triune God.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 20 (Red Hymnal)

"God of Mercy, God of Grace"

The Sermon – Text: John 6:56-69 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Shocking"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 387 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 536 (Stanzas 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul and with the Sun"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (32)

This Week at St. Paul:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Today | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Church Council Meeting |
| Mon-Fri | -6:30-8:30 p.m. | – Vacation Bible School |
| Next Sunday | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/Holy Communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour |

CLC News – Pastor Aaron Ude is considering the call to Faith Lutheran of Manchester, MO. Pastor Emeritus John Schierenbeck has returned the vacancy call to that congregation. Pastor Mark Tiefel has returned the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Please remember in your prayers recently retired Professor Paul Sullivan, who has been diagnosed with Stage 3 lung cancer.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

Vacation Bible School – This summer's Vacation Bible School is scheduled for this week, Monday-Friday. This year's theme is "Children of the Heavenly Father," and the daily sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each evening. There is a sign-up sheet for snacks on the mailbox table. For more information, please see Sandy Roehl.

Fargo Area Student Bible Study – A weekly Bible study for college-aged adults is conducted each year in the Fargo area by Pastor Matthew Gurath. Please let Pastor Roehl know of anyone going to school in the Fargo area (including both UND and NDSU) and he will forward their contact information to Pastor Gurath.

Sunday School Teachers – We are looking for Sunday School teachers for the 2021-22 school year. Please speak to Pastor Roehl if you can serve your Lord and his little ones in this capacity.