

Sermon for August 22, 2021

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We have been spending the last four Sundays reading a section of scripture from the gospel of John referred to as the “Bread Of Life Discourse” or as theologian Karoline Lewis and we have been calling them the “B.O.L.D” texts in which Jesus boldly states “I am the Bread of Life, the bread from heaven, the bread that gives life to the world.” In today’s scripture we see the disciples respond to these bold statements from Jesus. The first words we hear from the disciples in response to this section of scripture are “This teaching is difficult.”

“This teaching is difficult.” The disciples are struggling to understand and more importantly to accept what Jesus has just said. Jesus responds saying “Does this offend you?” Are you offended by who I say I am? “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” Jesus almost seems to say “If you think this is difficult just wait until you see what comes next.” Jesus has not only come as God in flesh, bread from heaven, but he will die and rise again and ascend to the Father once more to prepare a place that we to might live eternally with God.

“This teaching is difficult” and in our text today the disciples have **four distinct reactions** to difficult and bold words from Jesus.

First in verse 61 we read that some of the disciples **complain** about it. They grumble at the how hard it is to understand and how difficult it is to accept. I am pretty sure we can all relate to this response. How quick we are to complain when things are difficult for us to understand.

Secondly in verse 64 Jesus points out that some among them respond with **disbelief**. They have heard Jesus say I am the bread of life, I am sent from heaven, I am the word made flesh and they do not believe it is true. The disciples struggle to believe despite signs, despite Jesus’ presence -the ultimate sign of God’s promise there with them in the flesh. Can we also relate to these disciples’ struggle? A familiar prayer for many of us “Lord, help my unbelief.”

Then in verse 66 many of the disciples turn back and no longer go with Jesus. They **reject** what Jesus has said and turn away from him. “This teaching is difficult” and they walked away.

Finally, in contrast, Simon Peter in verse 68 says “Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” In response to Jesus’ BOLD words Simon Peter responds with **belief**.

Complaining, Disbelief, Rejection, Belief – Four Responses to Jesus’ difficult teachings.

Jesus asks “Do you also wish to go away?” This whole section of scripture wraps up with the question: What will your response be to Jesus’ difficult teachings, to Jesus’ bold words, to Jesus’ self-revelation of God in the flesh come to feed and give you abundant and eternal life? Will you complain? Disbelieve? Reject? Believe and come?

Peter says “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words...” Interestingly Peter continues “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” Notice Peter does NOT say “We have come to understand all that you have said.” He does NOT say “We have come to know what you mean and how this all works.” Rather Peter simply says “We have come to

believe and know THAT YOU ARE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.” We have come to know that *you* have the words. We have come to know that we must go to you, Jesus.

There are so many difficult words out in the world right now. Words that we complain about. Words that we meet with disbelief. Words that we outright reject. I feel like many of us have been responding “to whom can we go?” for truth, for comfort, for hope, for unity, for healing, for wholeness. Peter’s words today grab me at my core “Lord to whom can we go?”

Hear Peter’s response “You have the words of eternal life.” In all the chaos, in all the uncertainty, in all the suffering we are invited to echo Peter’s words “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” There is so much we do not know, so much we cannot understand, yet we come to know Jesus, the Holy One of God, the one with the words of eternal life.

In Lutheran theology we talk about the paradox of the now and the not yet. While we await the “not yet,” the time when Jesus will come again and make all things new, we believe we live in the gift of eternal life now, God’s promised presence with us today, Jesus the bread of heaven bringing life to the world for this very moment.

“Lord, to whom can we go?” Jesus calls us to come right now for truth, for comfort, for hope, for unity, for healing, for wholeness.

Our call to worship today sang out the words “Come to the Table.” As you entered you received a card, an invitation with many of the words from Christ found in John 6 (“*Dear Beloved Child of God, Come to me. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. Abide in me. Come to believe and know that I am the Holy One of God. Come taste and see that the Lord is Good.*”) On the back of the card is an outlined cross with Peter’s words “Lord to whom shall we go?”

I want to end the sermon time today and close out this four-week time of exploring the B.O.L.D. Bread Of Life Discourse by inviting you into a prayer practice using the back of this card. There are a lot of things on our hearts this week: ever expanding fires – loss of property and displacements, ever deepening drought, war in Afghanistan - refugees and deployments, the resurgence of Covid – new ill and dying, the beginning of a new school season – with lingering anxiety and uncertainty, and oh so much more in our lives as individuals. I invite you to lay that cross in your lap. Hear these words again “Lord, to whom can we go?” Hear Jesus say “Come, I AM.” Place your index finger at a bottom corner of that cross and begin to trace your way around the white space between the cross and the outline. As you trace your way around the cross bring your hunger and thirst for truth, for comfort, for hope, for unity, for healing, for justice, for wholeness to Jesus. Let us take a moment to circle the cross and come to Christ.

Jesus, we pray - make us BOLD to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God, the bread from heaven, the source of all life now and for all eternity. Amen.