

It can be difficult to hear someone tell us as we encounter a large bagful of M&Ms or a large bag of chips (Doritos Cool Ranch) that we shouldn't eat all of them it is not healthy. They taste so good. It can also be difficult to hear you should eat this liver or spinach because it has a lot of vitamins, especially if it doesn't taste good to you.

A man Jesus says he has come down from heaven as the bread God gives to the world. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. He says if you eat his flesh and drink his blood you will have eternal life.

The message to consume Jesus and be consumed by Jesus is difficult to hear and harder to accept. To incorporate at the center of one's being Jesus Christ, the living word of God and his self-giving death for the sake of the world is overwhelming to consider. The more we realize that believing means taking in Jesus and doing what he did, dying for others, the more difficult living out that belief becomes.

People are offended. It's not just the cannibal aspect, but Jesus asks us to believe something that doesn't fit with our idea of what is possible. Jesus asks us to let something outside of us bring life. He tells us that we are not in complete control of what brings us life. Can we accept that?

We complain and we are offended because we can't be who we want to be. There is something better, being shaped by Jesus to be all of who God has created us to be. Do we believe that?

There is no backing away from this difficult teaching. Jesus brings life. Life comes from Jesus living in us. Jesus confronts us with the truth. "There are some among you who do not believe." There are two ways that we stay in control and keep Jesus at bay. 1) Making the ultimate reality the visible world on which we can impose meaning and mastery. If we can't see it, we don't believe it. 2) Making the ultimate reality the mental/spiritual world where we alone can formulate true ideals. If we can't understand it, we don't believe it. When we are drawn near to Jesus we receive something far more than we can grasp with our mind. We must believe what we do not see.

This happens in baptism. We believe that God claims a person as his own in baptism and that the Holy Spirit is at work in a real way connecting that child or person to God. We can't see it or understand it. It is a work of God. It is a mystery. Still, we claim the promise that Jesus Christ comes bringing life and forgiveness of sins. We are to baptize all who the Lord our God calls.

In some ways the calling is simple, follow Jesus. In some ways our calling is difficult and complex, follow Jesus. We commit in baptism to follow him in a way that comes out in everything we do, in every relationship, as we choose to live and die for Christ and our neighbors. Both God's initiative and our ongoing faithful response are essential for following Jesus.

In 1 Kings 18, God tells Elijah who has been in hiding it is time to confront the evil king. What will Elijah do? Elijah has believed and God has provided. He must believe again and follow God despite his fear that he could be killed. He encounters a believer Obadiah who worked in the king's household. Obadiah had chosen to risk his life to help other faithful avoid capture. Now Obadiah had to risk telling the king that Elijah would meet him, knowing if Elijah didn't show he would die. Obadiah like Elijah faced difficult decisions to keep believing in God.

Elijah showed up and confronted the king and the people of Israel with the decision to believe. It is a difficult decision. There was famine, raising the questions, 'Does God really care?' 'Can God be real?' There was pressure to believe in another God and to do what the king did. Elijah challenged, How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

When there is a difficult challenge, when there is teaching about God that is hard to accept or understand, when we are asked to believe or to believe yet again, we may turn away.

Jesus taught about the importance of being drawn by God to gain life by taking Jesus into our lives in a radical all consuming way. And as John 6:66 says, "Many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him." They cannot abide in him. They cannot conceive incarnating Jesus to the world. They are afraid.

They are afraid what following will bring. They are afraid to follow when they are not in control of who Jesus is. They are afraid to follow when Jesus is defining reality and salvation; they might not get what they want. [Steering teams fears of time wasted or taken from us, we don't know what we are doing, we are doing the wrong thing, we are not in control of (not sure of) what exactly will happen. Fear can keep us from following Jesus.

Jesus knew from the first that some would not believe and that some would betray him. Even those called by God to follow Jesus can turn back and desert him. We can (prove our lack of belief) and go back to our former way of life, living for ourselves and not for Jesus. Many turn away from the one in whom we can find the things we seek.

Jesus asks his disciples, "Do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter says, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

Where else can we go? We look to gain life by going on vacation...back home...to some place more comfortable. The things we seek by going these places are not found in a place but in the person of Jesus Christ. The certainty, security, love, meaning, peace, intense experience we seek all are found in Jesus. The other places we would go reveal our need to follow Jesus.

We look to gain life apart from Jesus. Some people look to alcohol to find or get through life. Why would we settle for that which keeps us going when there is life available. Some people live a 'me first' life. Living this way takes life from others and eventually from us. Other alternatives to belief in Jesus are worse. The results of these alternatives again point us back to our need for Jesus.

Simon Peter concludes, "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." The disciples though they don't completely understand Jesus or his words, they know they are vital and they won't turn their backs on his past saving help. Not deserting Jesus even when it is tough draws us together with the others who make that same decision. Willingness to follow Jesus is what makes us a community of faith.

Opposite choice of deserting Jesus is found in Colossians. We toil and struggle with all the energy that God powerfully inspires in us to proclaim God who chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, so that everyone may be mature in Christ. We don't just have faith. We live out what Jesus says. Eternal life is a way of living that deprives fear of having the upper hand. We turn over control of what we fear most, what we worry about, though we don't have a complete understanding of how God will deal with it. We must take Jesus into our lives in a radical all consuming way.

Jesus asks us, 'Do you also wish to go away?'