

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Sermon for Sunday, August 16, 2009
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We've all been in the situation before where we're around somebody and they say something that is slightly offensive. And then to cover it up, they kind of dig deeper, and deeper into a hole. And they keep talking and talking, and you want to just give them advice and say, "Stop talking! You're only doing yourself harm."

We've all been in situations like that, we've all been the one doing the offending, ourself. In today's text, you almost get that picture of Jesus. The last three weeks we've been going through John chapter 6. And Jesus just keeps offending people. And it gets worse and worse, and he keeps getting more people angry with him and indignant towards him until, at the end, they turn away.

It's been happening for the past three weeks, if you haven't caught on, that He keeps saying these things that they take offense to. And they grumble about and they get angry about. Until finally it ends in today's reading. And you wonder if the disciples were like that with Jesus at different times of His ministry, saying, "Jesus, do you realize what you're saying? Do you realize the hole that you're digging for Yourself? do you realize that all these people are turning away from You?"

But Jesus does it for a reason. That's what we've seen through these weeks that we've been going through this text. Remember these are all people who have come to Jesus because they were there at the feeding of the 5000. They were there and saw Him feed all these people with this wonderful miracle. And they come to Him because they *like* Him! Because they want *more* of Him. These aren't people who were coming to trap Jesus. These aren't people that were coming to take anything away from what He was doing. These are people that were coming because they wanted to follow Him, and He goes and He just starts offending them from the very beginning.

The very first thing He says to them is they are looking for the wrong thing. And they are looking for bread that perishes and they should have their minds on other things. He then belittles Moses, which seems pretty sacrilegious, except for that He's Jesus and He's far, far greater than Moses and they were holding Moses higher than Him. He tells them that, even though they've seen Him, they don't believe.

And He goes on and on. He starts saying these hard things, that He's the bread that's come down from heaven. And they listen to this and they say, "How can this be the One that has come down from heaven? This is Jesus, the son of Joseph." And then He tells them to stop grumbling about that, and to get over themselves.

He tells them to stop grumbling and doing what they're doing. And that leads us to today's text, where almost the worst offense possibly happens. He's told them that unless they eat of His flesh, His flesh that is given them to eat. And they say, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" And Jesus goes even *further* into offensiveness. He says, "Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."

You have to remember who Jesus is talking to here. He's talking to these Jewish people. And what is the Jewish reaction to blood? Blood is what has the life in it, and you don't drink it! The animals that they would sacrifice - to make them kosher, they cut and drain all of the blood out because you're not supposed to partake of that. And now Jesus is telling them, "Unless you eat of My Flesh and drink of my blood you have no life in you." That's an incredibly hard and offensive thing for Jesus to say.

"Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

Looking back on it now, we can read this and not be all that offended by it. But for the people who were there, hearing this...imagine if you were in their place. This is a hard saying! And that's what they say to themselves. They debate it back and forth. "How can He say these things? This is hard saying. (Literally, a "hard word".) And who can listen to it?"

And to that, how does Jesus respond? Does He lovingly lower what He's saying? Does He lovingly and compassionately reach out to them and take back His offense? No. He offends them *more* by saying, "Do you take offense at this? Do you take offense at this wonderful truth, this life-giving gift that I am giving to you?"

"But it's a hard saying, and after this many of His disciples - many that were following Him - turned back and no longer walked with Jesus."

Jesus really didn't do things the way that marketing execs would tell Him to. He didn't change His message to get more people to follow Him. He spoke the truth...and He spoke it offensively. It offended and caused a stumbling to them. That's what God's Word *does*. It did it back then, and it does it still today.

The Gospel has two different reactions: either it creates faith in somebody, or it causes an offense. Because God's Word *is* hard. Those that were discussing this were absolutely right. "This is a hard saying, this is a hard word. Who can believe it? Who, if left to their own reasoning, and left to their own work can believe such a thing as this?" So they turn away. And that's, sadly, the reaction of many in today's world.

The Word of God is offensive. And here's something to think about: it's OK. It's OK to be offensive. But if you're going to be offensive as a church, as a person, you better do it the way Jesus does. And that is where we see the grace of God. When Jesus offends

somebody, He is speaking the absolute truth. And when He causes offense to somebody, He's doing it for their own good. Not for His own good, not for His own betterment. If that were the case, He would've done things many, many different ways. But in everything He does, He does it for the person that He's talking to. He does it for those that hear His word, and that's what's happening in today's text.

He tells them the hard truth, something that is offensive to their ears, but something that truly gives life. That's how it is in today's world as well. The Word of God is offensive, and it's hard. And it doesn't say that it's not. If you read through your Bibles - which is a good thing to do - in the book of Hebrews, it says that the Word of God is living and active. It's "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit and of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart and no creature is hidden from its sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account."

The reason the Word of God is offensive is not because it's the Word of God. It's because of us. Because it does pierce us to our soul. It divides us, it lets us know who we are and that's not an easy thing to take. It leaves you naked and exposed to God, in the most shameful state that you can be. The Word is offensive to us because it tells us things we don't want to hear. But it tells us things that we need to hear. It tells us that we are sinners who have turned away from God. We are sinners who are dead in our trespasses. And it tells us of the Word of the Cross.

And that Word of the Cross, the Word of Jesus, is something that the Bible says is offensive. Paul writes about that, he says that the "Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified which is a stumbling block. Literally, it is an offense to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. But to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," is what the word of the Cross is.

And those people are offended and they're ready to leave Jesus. He says, "This is why I've told you you can only believe if you're called by the Father." Because you can't believe yourself, you can't listen to Jesus' words and understand it with reason and with your own knowledge. It's only called by God through the workings of the Holy Spirit that the word of the Cross becomes something that is not an offense. That Jesus saying "Take and eat my flesh and blood," is not an offense - but a gift.

The most offensive word is certainly the Word of the Cross, where Jesus reverses things completely. Where the Word of God, in its flesh, is not hidden - but is the One that is naked and exposed to our eyes on the Cross. *That* is the offense of the Cross.

But our sin is put there on the Cross, On Jesus, on the One who is perfect, the One who is innocent. The One who came for us and does everything for you. It is because of you that He is crucified. Because of You that He dies.

It's offensive that that little Baby born in Bethlelem that we sing about so lovingly at Christmas is really born to go to the Cross. Is really born with His life goal to go and die for the sins of the world.

But that's also Gospel. Hearing it through the words of the Holy Spirit, faith is created in your hearts and that offensive language of Jesus becomes Gospel-language to you because it brings you to what He promises. It brings you life and salvation. He gives you His flesh and His blood and you have eternal life. You possess Him, you abide in Him - in His perfection, and His perfection abides in you.

Jesus, after many turn away from Him, turns towards His twelve disciples. And He says, "Do you want to go away as well?" After hearing all these things and knowing that these are hard sayings - and they were hard sayings for the twelve as well. They didn't understand everything at all. But Peter answered, "Lord, to Whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Almost as if to say, "Yes Jesus, these are hard sayings. But where else is there to turn? We know we're sinners, that Word of God cuts to our hearts. Where else can we go?" We can't go to ourselves, we can't go to our works, we can't go to our reason. We listen to Jesus. Because He is the One that is sent by God. He is the One that has come to redeem the world.

It's OK that Jesus' words are offensive, because they're absolutely true. Because they're spoken for our benefit. They're hard words to hear and they may be offensive words to speak. But they are the only words that give life. The Body and the Blood of the offense of the Cross come to you with and under the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper.. you hear it and yes it pierces you to your soul, but in that piercing it creates a new heart, it creates faith. It creates life. It gives you Jesus, which is why we're here. To come and to see Jesus, to hear His words and to have life.

Yes, these words may be offensive, but they're the only words that give us true peace. And now may this peace of God that surpasses all of our understanding, may it guard, may it keep our hearts and our minds in Jesus Christ alone. Amen.