

# Sermon for Proper 16, Year B

The Text: John 6:56-69

So, where are you going to go? Who are you going to turn to? Whose words are you going to believe?

In a sense, this is what faith boils down to. Who are you going to trust and believe?

In response, you might be tempted to say: 'Well, we must all believe in Jesus Christ!' And you're right, but it's not that easy!

You see, we don't always want to trust in Jesus. There are a lot of other enticing and appealing voices in our world today which attract people, even though they're ultimately empty of hope and peace.

On top of this, what Jesus says doesn't always make perfect sense - we don't always get what he means, and we don't want to live according to his words and ways.

It's like we think we know better, and what the world offers is more enjoyable. We seem to trust our own thoughts, understanding, and logic rather than trust what Jesus says. We don't want what he offers.

In our text today, Jesus has just been teaching a crowd of his disciples - you know, the types of people who actually *wanted* to learn from him - they weren't just curious passers-by. In a sense they're like us - followers of Jesus. But even though they were following him, they didn't like what they heard.

They heard they had to eat his flesh - swallow the truth about him, so to speak. But they'd seen him grow up. They saw how human he was. They knew his parents. And now he was saying he came from God! In fact, he was saying he was God in human flesh! He was the great and holy God: the 'I AM'!

This was hard for them to swallow; hard for them to believe. Apart from his miracles and his wise and authoritative teaching, he just seemed so...normal!

Since they were offended by the teaching that Jesus came from heaven, then Jesus teased them with a question of what if he went up into heaven? Would they finally be convinced then, or would they still have trouble swallowing this?

What's more, they heard they had to drink his blood – swallow the truth about what he came to do. In this way, he wasn't going to be the king and miracle worker they wanted, but he was going to shed his blood as a sacrifice for their sin.

This meant they needed him to die for them, but they didn't think they needed this. They were God's chosen people. They were good people. They thought themselves faithful people. They didn't think they needed anyone to take their place at an execution.

Then again, perhaps it offended them because it all seemed too easy. Eternal life simply by believing? But what about being good enough for heaven?

Surely only the good, faithful, obedient, and specially chosen people of God get this eternal life, or is God really offering this heavenly privilege to everyone simply through faith? What's the point of all our obedience and servitude then?

Well, after hearing all this, they figured he wasn't giving them what they wanted, so they stopped following him. What he said about himself was too much. What he wanted them to believe is ludicrous and absurd. So, they left him to find someone or something else who would give them what they wanted.

Despite Jesus himself proclaiming the gospel in its truth and purity, they left him. The gospel will turn some people away – especially those who want a different type of good news for their own desires, or a different type of good news that fits their own thinking.

In the end just the twelve were left. Well, there may have been other disciples who didn't leave, but Jesus specifically turned to his chosen twelve. Would they leave too?

If so many stopped following Jesus, how would Christ's obedience, suffering, and death save the world if there were so few to believe...and even some of those were suspect!

Then Peter confessed there's nowhere and no-one else they can turn to. Even though what Jesus says is hard to believe, trusting his word is the only way to eternal life.

His words were enough. Even if there were no more miracles, his words would truly satisfy them in this earthly life, and they were the only words which would guarantee their eternal life.

But what about us? Do we also want certain miracles, different teachings, or to live out our faith another way? Or are Jesus' words enough for us? Do we trust what he says, even if what he says is the opposite to what we want to hear, or are difficult to believe?

Well, let's consider his words in relation to baptism.

If you think about it, it's just a little splash of water. What on earth can that do? It wasn't even a very good wash! Most likely you were already clean anyway!

Yet, as Luther says, it's not just water. It's water used according to God's command and connected with God's word. Because of its connection to the Word of God—the Word made flesh—baptism brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it.

The power of baptism lies in trusting the Word of God, as ludicrous and far-fetched as it may seem. Without this trust in God's Word, it's only a quaint ceremony which is easily forgotten. But with trust in God's Word, it grants heavenly blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

As simple and earthly as it seems, it brings heavenly benefits through faith: after all, those who believe and are baptised are saved, but those who don't believe will be condemned (Mk 16:16).

Similarly, let's consider Jesus' words in connection with Holy Communion.

On the surface it's just a wafer of dry and almost tasteless bread (which can easily stick to the roof of our mouth), and a sip of wine. It's not even enough to call it a snack, let alone a meal which satisfies!

Yet, it's not just bread and wine, but it's these simple elements used according to God's command and again connected to his Word. Even the eating and drinking itself doesn't do anything, but the power of God's Word and your trust in his Word.

This is why Luther says of everyone who eats and drinks this meal in faith: whoever believes in these words: 'given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin', has what they declare and state, namely, the forgiveness of sin.

Again, it's about trusting God's Word, even though it sounds absurd. We eat and drink according to God's command and trust what he says actually happens.

Through faith in God's Word, you receive what he promises. Through faith we feast on Christ's body and blood and receive all the benefits of his life, death, and resurrection. Through faith we gather with angels, with all the other people who eat and drink in faith across the world, and with all the residents of heaven.

A simple and earthly meal, yet the benefits of trusting God's Word brings heavenly benefits.

In fact, in every stage of life, his words of the Old and New Testaments, as the means by which God gives his Holy Spirit, grants faith to trust even when things go wrong in your life. His words have power to satisfy, comfort, and nourish broken hearts.

For example, when we're being tempted or tested, we can trust what God says through his apostles, that we'll experience no temptation except those common to all. God is faithful; he won't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. And even when we're tempted, he'll provide a way out so that we can stand (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When we're facing spiritual attack; we trust God clothes us with the full armour of God, which includes the sword of the Spirit – the word of God (cf. Ephesians 6:10-18).

When we've sinned against others and hurt them deeply, or even when people have abused or hurt us deeply, we trust and know the Lord is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

When a loved one who trusts in Christ is dying, we trust the promise of Jesus who says 'those who believe in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11:25-26).

When we're suffering in your body, feeling depressed, or simply struggling with getting old, we trust God's promises so we don't lose heart. Because St Paul says even though outwardly we may be wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed every day. Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs all our troubles. So, we trust him by fixing our eyes on what is unseen, because what is seen is temporary, while what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

When we're afraid, trust the Lord is our light and salvation. The Lord is the stronghold of our life, so of whom should we be afraid? (Psalm 27:1) Since we trust the Lord is our helper, there's no reason to be afraid, after all, what can humans do to us to separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus? (Psalm 118:6-7 and Romans 8:38-39)

When we're struggling with direction and purpose in your life, trust Jesus that we should first seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to us as well (Matthew 6:33).

As hard as some of God's words are, especially those spoken and fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who else can offer so much?

His word brings comfort, direction, warning, forgiveness, and peace. Our trust in his word stabs the devil. Our trust in his word brings life – even

life with him in his eternal kingdom. The alternative to trusting his words aren't as nearly as good as we first think!

So, to whom shall we go? The Lord has the words of eternal life! Amen.