

Sermon for Proper 16, Year B

The Text: John 6:56-69

Driving in a foreign country can be nerve racking at the best of times. But in a place like Paris where the signs are in another language, the roads are narrow and originally designed for horse and cart, not to mention the fact that Parisians drive on the other side of the road and the steering wheel is on the left—the experience is enough to ruin a holiday!

Thankfully a lot of the challenges have now been answered by the use of a GPS which frees the driver up to concentrate on avoiding accidents, while the GPS tells us where to go. In such a situation the words that come from the GPS are life-giving words.

Of course, it's possible that a GPS won't take us on the most direct course, and local drivers who know the streets well will often ignore the computerised directional expert. But for someone in a foreign city on the wrong side of the road and with a steering wheel where there is normally only a glove box – that voice is a life saver! At home we might ignore our GPS when we're in familiar territory, but it's a smart idea to let it do its thing when we don't know where we are or where we are going.

In the same way, we should listen to Jesus' voice. Too often, like Jesus' Jewish followers in our reading, we can stop listening to Jesus' word, often because we think we know better. But it is always to our detriment. Jesus had said to Jews who were following Him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." And when He said this many of them – people who had been faithfully following Jesus – got up and left. They decided that Jesus' words were too hard to understand, they took offense at what he said, and so they stopped following Him.

It seems to me that very little has changed in 2,000 years. Back then people were happy enough to follow Jesus so long as He did and said what they expected. Let Him feed the hungry, heal the sick and show compassion to those rejected by society, but don't let Him have too much to say about how a person should live! That's the kind of attitude those in our text who stopped following Jesus had, and that's the attitude of many people today.

We're happy to follow Jesus and listen to Him, but if His words are hard to hear then maybe we're not so excited. If His word challenges us and

demands that we change or give up those things we love, then perhaps we won't be so thrilled to come to church or have the pastor visit.

We live in an age and a culture that is almost totally self-centred. If people don't like what is being said on TV, they turn it off. If they don't like what someone says on social media, they call them a bigot, a hater, or some other nasty name, but they never actually engage the person in discussion. We have bought into the lie that life is all about us! And so, in our self-centred age, it is tempting to think that the whole reason for life is so that we may have our happiness, no matter the cost to us or anyone else!

Many don't want to listen to the hard words Jesus speaks because they don't want to change their direction. What's important is our life, and our life alone ... at least that's what the Devil wants us to think! There are people who ignore God and live outside of His will yet still want his blessing. There are those who justify unloving and abusive actions towards others. There are those consumed with their own will and desires to the detriment of others. There are those who redefine God's institution of marriage. There are people who justify the deaths of millions of unborn babies because their life is more important!

Make no mistake, every one of us are tempted to ignore the hard words of Jesus, and say that He is all about love and so it doesn't matter what we do—that we can change, ignore or conveniently forget key teachings of the bible. But here's the thing—ignoring any of Jesus' words is no different to those who stopped following Jesus because they didn't like what they heard. It leads to death, because without Jesus and His word, there is no life.

When some of the Disciples stopped following Jesus because of His message, He didn't change the message. He didn't water it down, make it politically correct or adjust it to the culture. As sad as it was that some refuse to follow Jesus on anything except their terms, He knew it would happen. In fact Jesus turns to Peter and says: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" And that's where Peter shines more brightly than anywhere else in the Gospels. He said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Perhaps we have always had Jesus in our lives and so we don't know what it's like without Him. Well if that's the case we are blessed. But take it from any of those among us who came to faith later in life – life without Jesus and His precious word, life is dark and lacks real hope. Sure it might be fun for a while, but when our conscience is troubled, we realise

that our days are numbered, that our sin is real, and that judgement is coming, it's not a nice place to be.

But by the power of the Holy Spirit, God has compassionately and mercifully brought us to believe and to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God who has the words of eternal life.

To whom will we go?

Jesus has the words of eternal life!

So when we struggle to accept all of Jesus' words, when we are tempted to only follow the words that are pleasing to us...hear Jesus who says, "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*" ...

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day." (John 6:51–54)

What wonderful words from the Lord – they are not hard to hear because they are nothing but good news! Words that call us! Invite us! That make us promises! These words offer life because they proclaim that there is forgiveness and salvation in the body of Jesus broken for us and in the blood of Christ shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. These are words that declare we cannot save ourselves -they offer eternal life itself as we feast on all that Jesus has done for us.

Jesus is the Bread of Heaven given for the life of the world. In giving up His own body on the Cross He has chosen us, and as He declares: "*It is finished!*" He is talking about our salvation. So surely we must say together with Peter: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Amen.