

President Teddy Roosevelt had a word for people, especially politicians, who could not make up their minds. He called them mugwumps. A bird that sits on the fence with its mug on one side and its wump on the other.

We see Jesus dealing with people like this throughout His ministry. People who follow Him but only halfway. Well, in our text for today, that is all going to change. He had already been giving the fence a shake or two, telling the people that He is the living bread that came down from heaven. Now, as He teaches in the synagogue at Capernaum, He gives the fence one last, hard shake by saying, *“Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.”*

Can you hear all the wumps hitting the ground? They are falling backwards off the fence away from Jesus. *“This is a hard saying,”* they grumble, *“intolerable”* in the Greek; *“Who can listen to it?”* So, the fence clears, the people walk away, and Jesus is alone with the Twelve.

Kind of makes us wonder, doesn't it? Jesus had all the makings of a mega-church here. But with a few words He brings it to a screeching halt. Doesn't He want people to follow Him, even if they are on the fence about fully committing themselves to Him?

Well, hear what Jesus says to His church in Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3: *“I wish you were either cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of My mouth.”* It sure sounds like He wants no fence-sitters in His church, doesn't it?

In Luke 19 we see a man who was a mugwump. Zaccheus is sitting up in a tree as Jesus passes by underneath. That tree is his fence, and he is safe up there on it, not committing to Jesus, yet able to check Him out with his mug. But Jesus shakes his fence too. *“Hurry and come down, Zaccheus,”* He calls, *“for today I must stay at your house.”* *“Stop being a mugwump. Get off your fence.”* And he does. Zaccheus comes down and he receives Jesus gladly.

In a way, the last year and a half has been a shaking of the fence. God has been shaking the fence on which people all over the world have been sitting. Is He not saying to us what He said to His church in Laodicea? *“It is time to be cold or hot. Either be a Christian or don't be a Christian. But stop this lukewarm business of sitting on the fence.”*

God truly desires for all sinners to be saved. The Gospel of salvation is for all, and He wants all to be hot, believing the Gospel. But just sitting on the fence, can we even call that faith? Yet so many do it. Unwilling to commit to Jesus, yet thinking they are good enough just peeking over with their mugs at Him now and then.

Even church people like to sit on the fence of the membership rolls. Not wanting to fully commit to Jesus and His church. Some not even desiring to act as church in hearing Jesus gladly and receiving His Sacraments of salvation. Yet not really wanting to be off the fence of the membership rolls.

Sitting on the fence is a dangerous place to dwell. Better, in fact, to be cold than to be lukewarm. This is why Jesus shakes the fence hard in our text. Far too many of His disciples were on the fence of His discipleship rolls. They were lukewarm. But lukewarm is not hot, it's not faith.

Yet if someone is cold, falling off the fence backwards away from Jesus, that lost sinner becomes one whom the Good Shepherd seeks in love. But what can be done for someone who thinks he is safe on the fence? Those who think they are well have no need of the Physician. And so, the Pharisees were on the fence, but the prostitutes and publicans were not. These were cold. And Jesus sought them and many of them He found.

He did this for Zaccheus. Can He not do this for any of us? And so, Jesus must shake our fences because we won't. And we cannot fall toward Him; just backwards away from Him. "*No one can come to Me,*" He says in our text, "*unless it is granted him by the Father.*"

The people were absolutely correct when they grumbled, "*Who can listen to (Jesus)?*" No one. It's true. No one can accept what Jesus says about Himself. No one can leap off the fence toward Jesus believing that He is the living bread that came down from heaven. No one can accept His claim that eating His flesh and drinking His blood is eternal life. But then also, no one can accept baptism as God's gracious work to make us His dear children, giving us a place in heaven with Him. No one can accept that Jesus' true flesh and blood are given to us in the bread and wine of the Sacrament. And no one can believe that Jesus was crucified for all sinners and then rose again on the Third Day.

But wait. Is all this not what you believe? And not only do you believe all these truths about Jesus; you also live what you believe. Then the Heavenly Father has drawn you to Jesus. And He keeps drawing you to Jesus so that you are convinced in your mind and heart that with Jesus you want to stay. So, when the fence is shaken and you realize that you have been lukewarm, and Jesus says, "*Do you want to leave Me?*" you say with Simon Peter, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!*"

Friend, wherever you are in life, on the fence, cold, or hot; whether you were a mugwump or still are, one thing is clear – Jesus died for you. He was no mugwump. He gave Himself fully to you and for your salvation. And He forgives you, friend, no matter where you have been, no matter where you are right now. He forgives you.

And because He does, you can get off your fence. Because as Jesus called to Zaccheus, so He calls to you, "*Hurry and come down,*" because He intends to stay with you today and forever. Amen.