

John 6:51-69

When the woman in Matthew 15 came to Jesus for help, He said some very hard things to her; things which would have been difficult for anyone to accept. He told her that He wasn't there to help her, and He called her a dog...to her face. Did she walk away? No. His words to her could not turn her away. She stayed with Him. She persisted. She clung to Him in faith.

We see the opposite of this in our text for today. Jesus says some hard things which are difficult to accept, and which, on the surface, sound ridiculous. He speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Those who do this, He says, have eternal life. Unlike the woman in Matthew 15, many who heard these things from the mouth of Jesus turned away from Him. These are not curious onlookers. These are disciples who had been following Him. Not the 12, but the 72 whom He had sent out in pairs to be His witnesses. They get up and walk away. "This man is impossible!" they say as they leave, "Only a fool would listen to Him!"

Let me ask you this -- what would it take for you to leave Jesus? For you to walk away and cease being His disciple? Is there something, anything, that could cause you to act as the disciples did in our text? "*They turned back,*" it says, "*and no longer walked with Him.*" I suspect that in your minds right now you are saying, "No! There is nothing! Nothing can cause me to act in that manner. I would never walk away from Jesus."

You place yourself, not with the 72 disciples, but with the 12. Peter speaks for them in saying, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" Peter and the other eleven were not jumping for joy when Jesus was saying these difficult things. They, like the 72, were bothered as well by Jesus' words. But they did not leave on account of them. "We're staying put, Jesus," they said. "It doesn't matter what You say...we're sticking with You."

Now let's do a little math here. 72 is 12 multiplied by 6. In our text, six times as many disciples stopped following Jesus as those who stayed with Him. Those are not good odds. I wonder if they are the same today? They could be worse. Of those who are Jesus' disciples today, could we say that six stop following Him for every one who sticks with Him? One in six. Actually, that's pretty close to the truth. Of those Christians who are baptized into Christ, about one in six remain with Jesus according to the statistical reports.

But even the twelve disciples who stayed with Jesus did not all remain with Him. One of them, Judas, fell away with a great fall. Another, Peter, denied and disowned Jesus. And the other ten all scattered as well. In the Garden of Gethsemane they resembled the 72 disciples as they all turned tail and fled from Jesus. So in reality, the odds are not that one in six stays with Jesus --as bad as that is -- it's zero in six. No one stays. Not even those, like Peter, who say, "Where shall we go?"

He found a place to go -- away from Jesus. In the courtyard of the high priest, the words of a servant girl sent Peter fleeing from Jesus just as fast as he could run. One little sentence is all she said. "*You also were with Jesus.*" But her words caused Peter to cut all ties with his Lord.

So the 72 left Jesus because of what Jesus said, but then there are those, like Peter, who leave Jesus because of what someone else says. The devil gets us coming and going, either with Jesus' own words,

or with the words of someone else. There are those today, like the 72, who keep their distance from Jesus because He says what seems impossible...about God being triune -- Three in One; about Baptism being the work of God through which He saves sinners; about the Lord's Supper being the Sacrament of His true flesh and blood for us Christians to eat and drink for eternal life. These are hard things to accept because our puny minds cannot grasp the things of God. Faith must come before understanding. If we must understand before we believe, we will never believe, but like the 72, we will walk away from Jesus in frustration.

And then there are those today, like Peter, who walk away from Jesus because of what someone else says. A church member stops coming because another member said something offensive and hurt their feelings. A young person in school walks away from Jesus because her friends put her down for going to church with her family.

One thing should be clear to us...the most impossible thing in life is to stay with Jesus as His faithful disciple. Jesus Himself says this: *"This is why,"* He says in our text, *"I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted to him by the Father."*

The fact that you are a faithful disciple of Jesus who remains with Him and does not walk away is not because you beat the odds; it's by the grace of God the Father. The Christian Faith is not about odds and statistics; it's about God in mercy doing the impossible. *"Do you want to leave also?"* Jesus asks us, and our sinful flesh says, "Yes!" And we would walk away, everyone of us, were it not for our loving God. Even the Twelve would have left Jesus forever had the Father not brought them back. Everyone of them, except for Judas, God brought back to their Lord and Savior...even Peter.

It is nothing for God to do the impossible. He created everything out of nothing. He took on human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary to suffer and die on a cross for us. He commanded Baptism as the means to bring us to Jesus. He promises to be in the Holy Supper for us to eat and drink for eternal life.

God did the impossible for you. He has made you Jesus' disciples by water and word. He has made this congregation a place of refuge where His love is seen in your lives. Not one of us would be here except that God does what seems nonsense to us -- He forgives sinners. He loves doing this. He forgives you. You may have a pathetic past--terrible sins you have done, just as I have done. But God forgives you in Christ Jesus. Impossible? No, it's the truth. And the fact that you believe it is also God, in mercy, doing the impossible.

Jesus did not build His church with those 72 disciples who walked away. He worked through the Twelve, minus one. We may not have 72 disciples here today; but we do have twelve. So now watch as God does the impossible. Through Jesus' words, which are eternal life, God who has given this life to you will, through you, give it to others. Will you meet up with resistance and rejection? Of course you will. Even Jesus did. But He is the Holy One of God. There is no other Savior from sin. He is your Savior, and He is the Savior of everyone out there.

What are the odds that you and I will remain faithful to Jesus unto death? And that, not only will God work within us, but through us in others? Who cares! Jesus beat the odds for you. Throw them all out. It's not one in six who will be saved. It's those who, by the grace and working of God, stay with Jesus. Amen.