

What would we call a person who takes offense at Jesus, who refuses to listen to Him, and does not walk with Him? A scribe? A Pharisee? A pagan? Here in our text such a person is called a disciple. It's Jesus' disciples who say, *"This is a hard saying; who can listen to Him!"* It's to His disciples that Jesus asks, *"Do you take offense at this?"* And it's many of Jesus' disciples, we're told, who *"turned back and no longer walked with Him."*

*"I am the living bread that came down from heaven,"* they hear Jesus say, *"And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh... Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life."* And upon hearing this, many of His disciples come to the decision that they are done with Him. And they go back to their previous commitments, to the life they had before they began to follow Jesus.

This is sad, to see these disciples of Jesus turn away from Him. And it's sad to see the same thing taking place today. In fact, it's heart wrenching, especially when these disciples are near and dear to us.

There are two things we need to avoid. First, we must not deny what is truly obvious when someone has no use for Jesus' words, no desire to feed upon His flesh and blood in the Sacrament. Second, we must not lose hope for such as these. There is still time. And there is still someone who is praying for them: you are. And never think that Jesus ignores your prayers. Never think that even when a dear one of yours has turned away from Jesus and no longer walks with Him, that Jesus is done with them. Even if, my friends, even if it seems impossible that he or she could never come back to Jesus.

But it's not going to help if we think they are fine the way they are; if we refuse to admit what is obvious, that they are lost and need to be found. If we think that they are fine, and not lost, why would we pray for them fervently, and even with tears? And why would we pray for an open door to speak to them about their lost condition?

Such were some of us here at one time. But someone was praying for us, and likely even spoke to us. And Jesus never gave up on us. He did what seemed impossible to our loved ones, and brought us back to Himself.

Here in our text, Jesus watches His disciples walk away. He then turns to His twelve disciples, and it sounds as though He expect them to walk away also. *"Do you want to go away as well?"* He asks. But then we see Peter responding for them all. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*

This is you, isn't it? Peter speaks also for you. *"Walk away from Jesus? Where would I go?"* If this is you, it's not because of anything in you. It's because of the grace and mercy of your God. *"No one can come to Me,"* says Jesus, *"unless it is granted him by the Father."*

Your coming to Jesus in your baptism was the Father's doing. Your remaining with Jesus is the Father's doing. Your ears being open here in church, your desire for Jesus' flesh and blood in the Sacrament – this is the Father's doing. It's not your doing. It's not my doing. It's your Heavenly Father. He who sent Jesus to be the bread of life for you, He who sends His Holy Spirit so that you feed upon Jesus with desire – He is the One we thank with grateful hearts for His mercy toward us. And He is the One to whom we pray, asking Him, pleading with Him, to show that same mercy toward our loved ones.

To better understand this mercy of our Lord, we need to look back in John Chapter 6 to what happened the day before our text. Jesus fed more than five thousand people with a few loaves and some fish. And what came from this is the same thing that comes from the meals that we eat: leftovers. I suppose we might call them scraps. Some families put these scraps in the fridge for later. Some give them to the dog. And some toss them into the garbage.

They're leftovers, what is left over after the meal. They're not very exciting. When kids ask, "What's for dinner?" do they jump with joy when they hear, "We're having leftovers." No! They're the scraps that are left over, that were passed over the first time around. And the kids say, "Why can't we forget the leftovers and order a pizza?"

Who wants leftovers? Jesus does. He told His disciples to gather up all the leftovers. And how many baskets did they fill? Twelve. Twelve baskets of scraps. Now I think this is significant. And here's why. The next day, the multitude of Jesus' disciples had had enough of Him. They were fed up to their eyebrows with Jesus. They left Him and walked away from Him. And as they are all clearing out, what's left? The leftovers. The scraps. And how many of these disciples are left over? Twelve. Twelve disciples become the leftovers.

I'm looking at such leftovers this morning. And maybe you feel like a leftover; like a scrap that life has passed over. Maybe you feel as though you're only fit to be tossed to the dog, or even worse, into the garbage. I feel like this when my sin overtakes me. I feel like a worthless scrap. Don't you?

But it's for scraps like us that Jesus was willing to go to the cross to suffer and die. And it's the leftovers, like His twelve disciples and like us, that Jesus picks up and places lovingly into His basket.

We see God's mercy in the way that Jesus deals with leftovers. Because here is the truth: you and I have treated Him as nothing more than a leftover. Not as someone all that exciting. Just the same old scrap Sunday after Sunday. And so, we give Him our leftovers. Not our best, but our scraps. You know it's true.

But friend, God is rich in mercy toward us. He gave us His best. He spilled His precious blood for you and me. And He declares us forgiven. The very people who treat Him like a scrap, He forgives. We, who so easily walk away from Him, He forgives.

I don't care how often you have walked away from Jesus, how many times you have refused to listen to Him – I have the joy of announcing to you that God forgives you. In His eyes, you are not a worthless scrap. You are precious to Him, and He forgives you.

And His love and mercy for you is also for your loved ones who no longer walk with Jesus; who, at the present time, are lost. After Jesus fed the five thousand, He told His disciples, "*Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.*"

Here is real hope for you and me. Jesus wants nothing to be lost. And through you, and through me, Jesus works to gather them up. They are not merely scraps in His eyes. They are precious souls for whom He died and rose again.

Here is His basket into which He has gathered us. Now let's go out and gather more leftovers into Jesus' basket. Amen.