

**Text: John 6: 56-69**

**Theme: Will You Also Go Away?**

**Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Fathers' Day Service on 17/06/2018 at 10.30am**

We set aside today to honour our fathers because they deserve to be honoured, especially. Fathers who are godly and who are there as servant leaders to their families.

A while back I read an article about the different roles that moms and dads played with their children. The image that stuck was one of a little boy nervously clambering up a playground climbing frame for the first time. Mom was at the bottom calling up to him: 'Be careful, watch where you put your feet, don't rush it, and take your time...' and Dad was shouting out: 'Go on, you can do it, what a boy, well done, reach for it!'

This image has been etched into my heart. I have watched my children grow up and observed how their Mom relates to them and the way I relate to them in my 'Dad' role. Neither role is more important than the other – they are just 'different.' What's the difference?

Ask any child: What is the difference between a 'Mom' and a 'Dad?' I guarantee you will get some fascinating (& often hilarious) answers.

Moms are smaller dads are larger. Dads go to work moms don't. You come from your mom's belly. Dads love to play moms don't. Moms talk a lot and dad listens.

Some of us have wonderful memories of our childhood and our fathers. I'd put myself in this category. But for others, perhaps the majority, fatherhood is a painful thought. Your dad wasn't very good to you, and you live with the scars from that: the hurt, the wounds, the damage. Still, for others, it wasn't that your dad was bad or good—he was just *gone*. He was absent, either physically or, perhaps worse, emotionally. For a few of you, your dad wasn't a part of your life because of death, and you may have struggled with the feeling of having been purposely abandoned, even though you know it wasn't your fault. Speaking to the theme of fatherhood will indeed strike a deep chord in your heart, but it won't make a pleasant sound—perhaps it will make a painful one.

And yet here is the good news of the gospel: Jesus Christ helps us know God as our Father, not just our Father, but our *everlasting* Father, One who will never leave nor forsake us, One who is always there for us, One who has us in the palm of his hand for ever and ever.

In fact, it is the distinctive privilege and distinctive mark of a Christian to know God as everlasting Father. This is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. You know God as Father. You don't grope in the dark looking for a Father when God is holding your hand. You don't ask for answers to problems that are yet to happen because you can rest secure your future in God's hands. You don't dread the impossible because you know that your Father is in absolute control. Even when life throws its worst at you, you can rest secured in your Father's love. Is that scary?

Many years ago, a missionary society wrote to David Livingstone, a Scottish Presbyterian pioneer medical missionary in Central Africa, and asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only because there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."

That takes us to the heart of our text this morning. John 6:56-69.

Every ministry and every ministry leader in the history of the Christian faith has faced tough times, and you may never get used to it. In any ministry endeavour there will always be times

of encouragement and times of discouragement. In discouraging times, ministry leaders often feel compelled to do two things. The first is to shore up as much support as possible and the second is to try to determine who is truly committed to the continued advancement of the ministry.

Jesus Christ clearly did not read some of the latest books on ministry leadership. As chapter 6 of John closes, it seems as though he is determined to drive away as many followers as possible from his ministry. Contrast this passage with the opening of John 6. There, Jesus feeds the multitude with a boy's lunch. And there were twelve baskets left over. Now, as the chapter closes, Jesus has not a multitude but twelve followers, one of whom is Judas, the traitor, lying in wait for an opportunity to betray (see v. 70). This is hardly a textbook example for today's church-growth experts, some of whom would likely recommend damage control and intensive strategies to shore up support. Jesus, however, gives the remaining disciples an opportunity to walk away: " 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve" (v. 67). But wait, this is more than an invitation to walk away. It is a call to commitment. A commitment to a Father's will no matter how hard; A commitment to trust the Father's way no matter how clumsy. Job is currently learning these ropes from our series on Job which we shall continue next week.

### **Tough Talk**

Today we often are reluctant to present the demands of Christ to would-be disciples because we fear putting them off Christianity and driving them away. That is not the way of Jesus in this passage. His words are difficult for many people in this crowd to understand and harder still to follow. He says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (v. 56). Then he seems almost critical of their proud heritage: "Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." The Jewish religious leaders have taught them that cannibalism — eating human flesh and drinking human blood, runs counter to their religious teachings, and remind them time and again that theirs is a heritage that had experienced God's provision. They fail to see past the words and realize that Jesus is using a metaphor that speaks to the real union that must take place if they would be his disciples and God's adopted children.

"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (v. 60). Jesus knows that many people in the crowd are there for what he can give them. He makes claims for himself that will force them to decide whom they will follow. Would it be the teachings and traditions of their old religious teachers or Christ's message that offends more than a few? The moment of decision has come and when his talk gets tough, the people drift away.

Christ's call to commitment is a double-edged demand. **First, it sets forth clearly his life mission and his expectation for those who would go further with him. Second, it weeds out shallowness of commitment from among them. As a result, thousands drop out. Now, Jesus turns to the twelve and asks his pointed question: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" It is a make-up-your-mind moment of a lifetime!**

Many people are walking away. Why is that? These verses help us to see some reasons.

### **The Truth Is Sometimes Hard to Handle**

Despite the fact that Jesus performs a miracle with a boy's meal, it is not long before suspicion, doubt, and open hostility set in against him. The majority of the people are not ready to commit to his unique claims and uncompromising truths about the way of salvation (v. 29), about his ultimate identity (v. 32), about his superiority to Moses (vv. 35, 49-58), or about salvation coming from God alone (vv. 35-65). **Witnessing a miracle or two is one thing. Unreserved commitment to the miracle worker can be another. When truth comes to us, we finally have but two ways to respond to it: We can receive it or reject it. The people in this crowd reject Christ's truth for many reasons.**

Later, the same people argue, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). They reject both him and his teaching.

There are others among the crowd who seem blind to truth no matter how obvious it is. They see and benefit from Christ's miracle with the loaves and fishes, and they marvel as to how Jesus crosses the lake (see John 6:5-13, 22-25). Yet, how soon they forgot! Call it memory myopia, if you like, for that is what it is. How can it be? Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (v. 65). Indeed, how can it be? "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Look around you. See what is happening in some areas of the church. There are those who leave the church because they say, "I don't get anything out of it ... that church did not feed me ... it didn't meet my needs." For them, church is all about what it does for them, with little or no thought given to what they might do for the church or its master. They run from fellowship to fellowship looking for the most recent famous convert or newest gospel gimmick. Let us be painfully honest: what they want is entertainment, not devotion to the Lord of the universe.

The truth is not always easy to accept nor readily apparent. We see this pattern in other places, too.

**With boldness and certainty, he asks the twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (John 6:67). How can he do that? Only because he knows that his truth will still be true even if he stands alone, as indeed he is destined to do when he goes to the cross and even the twelve leave him.**

#### **Authentic Disciples Cannot Walk Away from Jesus**

Peter answers for the twelve, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v. 68). There is, when all is said and done, only one way to follow Jesus Christ, and that is with ruthless self-abandonment, taking no step except those we take with him and for his glory.

A story about the sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador, Hernando Cortez, tells how he was so committed to his mission that he had his men burn their ships so that they would never be tempted to turn back in defeat.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to burn all our other ships. Peter can see what the crowd cannot see that day. He realizes that Jesus Christ is God's eternal bread come down from heaven and that he has the words of eternal life. As a result, Peter becomes a partaker of two great possessions that I offer to you today, in Christ's name. They are faith — the inward conviction that Jesus Christ is who he claims to be and will do everything he promises to do. The faith I offer you is not mere emotion. It is, rather, action. I invite you to choose to see it as an acronym, **F-A-I-T-H. F-A-I-T-H stands for FORSAKING – ALL – I – TRUST - HIM.** Jesus says, "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). When we receive Christ by faith, we then receive the second great possession of those who come to Christ completely. **It is the possession of Christian experience.** It is evidenced over time in new desires, new goals, new direction for your life, a full heart, and in the first-hand experience of seeing Christ do all he promises to do for those who follow him. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Once we have tasted the light of Christ's glory and have sensed the touch of the master's hand on our lives, and once we have known the best that he has to offer us, we will never again be satisfied with second best. Peter knows that and asks, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." We may wander away for a time, but like the prodigal son we will come to our senses and remember that life in the Father's house is life worth living, and we will come home.

**The call of this day is for each of us to examine our own commitment to Jesus. Do we follow him for what we imagine he can do for us or for who he is and what we can do for his glory?**

**What about you? Surely, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" If you will follow Jesus Christ, come with all your heart! Amen.**