Where Else Can We Go?

 Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Let’s face it, Jesus is a fantastic philosopher. If you got lost listening to him constantly explain the same thing over and over again I would understand. Yet, at the same time, you may get lost in the words he is saying, but they are captivating nonetheless. When you’re telling a group of people that they are going to have to eat your flesh and drink your blood, you have their attention. That’s without telling them that it will grant them eternal life and will raise them up on the last day. There is a lot to wrap your head around here, if you’re in the crowd and especially if you’re one of Jesus’ followers. We learn in this passage that Jesus had more disciples than just the 12, but by the end of this passage they were all gone. This talk of eating flesh and blood had chased them away. And if that hadn’t done the trick, the talk about raising people from the dead certainly would’ve done it. The disciple’s response to this discourse was, **“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”** After all, their teacher was supposedly endorsing cannibalizing himself, and then talking about it as though that is what could earn you salvation. Thanks to 2000 years of study and understanding, we know that Jesus was not asking the crowd to tear him apart, limb from limb. He wasn’t talking about raising an army of the dead, like zombies. We know what he is talking about, because we have context. We are looking back on this as an event in history. But imagine yourself being in the synagogue, while Jesus is saying this. Imagine hearing these words coming from someone’s mouth, not from words on a page. And so some of the followers of Jesus decide that this is way over their heads and they call it quits. Jesus wasn’t attempting to scare them or terrify them, he was attempting to challenge them, and they didn’t pass the test.

 When has God challenged you? Did he announce to you beforehand, “Be careful I’m going to put you to the test!” Now sometimes God absolutely puts those types of challenges before us. Sometimes we know that there are challenging times ahead, like that thing we know we have to do that we really don’t want to. What challenges down the road do you think face this congregation? We of course have to worry about the pace with which our world is becoming more and more secular. It seems that day by day Christianity is becoming more of a threat that must be dealt with. What about finances as the total interest in worship has declined through the years? There is a litany of challenges that this congregation faces just within the next month! The fact is that God challenges us all the time. Just look at the Gospel lesson. That is a challenge to us, to understand what Jesus is speaking of. The fact is that this passage of scripture has challenged theologians for centuries. In fact, the whole of chapter 6 in John is one of the most debated passages in the whole bible. When I was in college I lived with mostly engineers. One of them was a civil engineer, one was a computer science major, one was majoring in energy engineering, and a nuclear engineer. They all talked about their respective difficult classes during their senior years certainly. But they all took MATH 330, which I believe in vernacular terms is Advanced Calculus. It’s what would be considered a “weed out course”. This is the class where suddenly the kid gloves are off. These classes are intense, they require you to do your homework, they require you to do all the necessary reading, they require several additional hours of study a week and even then you aren’t guaranteed success. These are the classes that really challenge you to see if you have what it takes. Now I was a liberal arts major so I didn’t have a “weed out class” in college. But at the seminary the language courses of Greek and Hebrew are often difficult enough that they serve that purpose. And here in John chapter 6 Jesus gives the disciples their weed-out course.

 That is when Jesus boils down the course to one sentence. He says, “**The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.**” Jesus tells them that he is simply speaking to them of faith, and life. He is challenging them to live a life of faith. Not a life of pretend faith, but one of true faith, for it is through that true faith that they would see him for who he really is, the savior of the world. Jesus issues this challenge, and his followers leave him. All except for this tiny band of 12. Jesus confronts them, he challenges them, “Do you want to leave? Was that too hard for you too?” and Simon’s answer is fantastic. A man who is by this point a devoted follower answers, “**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.**” What I like about that answer is that you can tell that Simon doesn’t fully understand what Jesus is saying, much like everyone else. But his answer is fantastic because it is an answer of faith. “Where else would you have us go? We believe you have the words to eternal life because we believe you are who you say you are.” He doesn’t go into a detailed exposition of the words that Jesus just spoke, but rather he explains that he knows it’s all true when it comes to Jesus, and he knows that there is no one else he would rather follow.

When God challenges us, how often do we challenge him back? How often do we fight and toil and struggle with God to seize back some semblance of control in our lives? Do we fight with God so bitterly that when he asks us, “Do you want to go away as well?” that we throw up our hands and storm off? The words, “Lord, to whom shall we go” are a wonderful thing to have handy when the world starts to spiral, because who else really has the power to answer our prayers? Who else really has the power to deliver us from death? Who really has the power to forgive sins? Who really has the power to lay down his life for all mankind? Our Lord. There is no other. Thanks be to God this day that not only is our Lord the way to eternal life, but that he wants us to come to him. He wants us to share our burdens with him, because he is there to remind us that he has taken care of us. He has seen fit to give us the words of eternal life, he has seen fit to prepare a place for us. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.