

Pentecost 14; August 25 & 26, 2024

John 6:51-69

In our daily lives, we use thousands of words—some spoken in passing, others carefully chosen. But do we always consider the weight of the words we use? A simple phrase can lift someone up or tear them down. Words can build bridges or erect walls. *Words matter.*

Words can be a matter of life or death. Words can be used for life. If you have ever flown on a plane, you know that the exit row seats in the middle of the plane have extra leg room. Yet, with that luxury of leg room, there is responsibility that goes along with those seats. The flight attendant will ask you if you are willing to open that emergency in the event of an accident. The words and the instructions that he or she may give you may save lives. That same flight attendant may tell you that, in the event of a water landing there is a life vest under your seat. Those words might save your life. Words matter.

Words can be used to warn as well. If there is a big electric panel on the wall, the words that are printed on that panel warn that there is danger there. *Do not open! High Voltage.* You're standing near the edge of a cliff that drops straight down, you might want to listen to the words that tell you not to go on the other side of the fence or rail that is there. Do not try to take a selfie while standing on the edge of that cliff. One slip, you may lose your life. Words matter.

Words are used to communicate our thoughts inside our heads and into the heads of others. God uses words to communicate his thoughts into the minds of people like you and me. That is what Jesus has been doing in John chapter 6 which we have been focusing on the last few weeks in our Gospel lessons. Jesus has been calling himself the *Bread of Life*. Two weeks ago, we spoke about what Jesus does **TO** us. He satisfies our spiritual hunger. Last week, we focused on what Jesus does **FOR** us. He will raise us up on the Last Day. This week, we will focus on what Jesus does **IN** us. **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them."** Throughout this chapter in John, the tone of Jesus' words has been changing.

In the beginning of this chapter, Jesus takes 5 small loaves of bread and two fish, and tells his disciples to have the people sit down, so they can begin to distribute bread and fish to the 5,000+ people who were there. With his Words he makes this miracle happen. Yet, even though Jesus had satisfied their hungry bellies, he wanted to fill their hearts with the bread of life – spiritual life that could only be found in him. He wanted his words to *satisfy* their spiritual hunger.

It is no wonder that the next day the people came looking for Jesus so he could fill their bellies with food once again. Jesus needs to speak a little clearer: **"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."** Jesus had not come to be their grocery store. God had a much bigger plan for them than just to make their hunger go away. He had come **FOR** them. He wants to raise them on that Last Day. He wanted to give them bread that would last for an eternity.

As they began to realize what Jesus was saying to them, they begin to go from gratitude to grumbling, from satisfaction to skepticism. Jesus was making a pretty big claim here. In fact, it was a divine claim. He was the Savior who had been promised for thousands of years in the Old Testament. He was telling them clearly that the only way to get to heaven is going to be through him – the Son of God. **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** Believing in Jesus means receiving all the gifts he brings us – forgiveness, life and salvation. That's the point that Jesus is making in this chapter of John – you can't save yourself; but Jesus has.

In over a time of two days, things begin to change. The people in the crowds began to grumble. **"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'"** *Come on. We know this guy. How can he say that he came down from heaven?* They began to grumble not only because they knew him from little on, this just doesn't make any sense. **"Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'"** They didn't want to do what we just sang in the hymn before our sermon.

*Speak, O Savior, I am list'ning,
as a servant to his lord.
Let me show respect and honor
to your holy, precious Word,
that each day, my whole life through,
I may serve and follow you.
Let your Word e'er be my pleasure
and my heart's most precious treasure.*

They weren't listening to Jesus. They wanted to see a different kind of Savior. This is what they think, therefore, this is what we want. If Jesus wasn't going to give them what they want, then they really didn't need to listen to Jesus any more.

Yet, it wasn't just the Jews that were listening to change had a problem with his words. His disciples did too. **"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"** It isn't what Jesus was teaching them was difficult. This is Christianity 101. **"The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life."** You don't need anyone else. I'm the only way to get to heaven! Yet, they struggled with this. Why? If Jesus is the only way to God and heaven, then it says something about ourselves. Not only do we need to evaluate who Jesus is. We need to see who we are. We are not that good. We can not get to heaven without Jesus.

It breaks Jesus' heart to see the people begin to fall away from following him. He loves them so much that he is just going to keep on doubling down that they need him. Even though the disciples were still struggling with these words of Jesus, they still knew who he is. **"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."**

Words matter. The words of Jesus matter more than anything else in this world. His words change us. This Bread of Life has come to save us. He has chosen you to be his own. He has washed away all your sins; and that nothing can pluck you out of his hands. And when you hear the voice of your Savior in his word, you have only one answer to his probing question: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!** May God grant it. Amen.