

Pentecost 14
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John 6:60-69
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I would like to begin today by asking you to consider what an important role questions play in our everyday conversations. Isn't it true that, almost from the day we begin to talk, we do so by asking questions? We who are parents know from experience that a two-year-old, as he points from one object to another, repeatedly asks, "What's that?" After a while the question becomes "why?" "Why is the sky blue?" "Why can't I have a puppy?" "Why do you two kiss all the time?" Then the questions become more personal, more self-centered. "May I use the car tonight?" "May I stay out till after midnight?" "May I get a body part pierced?" Finally, as our reasoning powers develop, the questions take on an aspect of maturity and meaning. We find ourselves asking, "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" and, "Where am I going?" When we allow God to answer these questions in his Word, then we, like Peter in our text, can ask the last important question, namely:

Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?

- 1. What prompted this question?**
- 2. How was this question answered?**

1. The question of our text was addressed to Jesus by Peter at a time when people were deserting Jesus in droves. For a time Jesus had been immensely popular, with great crowds of people following after him. A huge wave of enthusiasm had swept over the people after Jesus had miraculously fed them in the desert. When Jesus refused to become their bread king, they turned their backs on him in disgust and followed him no more. Thus Jesus was left with only a handful of disciples, twelve in number, one of whom was Peter. It was he who on this occasion asked Jesus, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*"

We are living some 2000 years after the events of our text, but has anything of importance really changed? Think of the mind-staggering numbers of people who once walked alongside Jesus who have now deserted him. Baptized into his name most holy, instructed in his life-giving and life-sustaining Word, they proudly professed their faith in him and sincerely promised to be loyal to him and to his Word for life. But then, in time, for reasons without number, they chose to leave him and walk with him no more.

We must ask, "Why?" Some, we can be sure, took offense at Jesus' words. We read in our text, "*On hearing [this],*" namely, Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Life come down from heaven, "*many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'*" What Jesus was teaching them clashed with their own natural and limited reason. That they couldn't accept and, as a result, they left him. Others, because of their religious convictions, found themselves ridiculed by their rabbis and classmates. They became ashamed of Jesus and abandoned him. Others, growing careless in their use of God's Old Testament Scriptures and prayer, chose ungodly friends, learned to love the pleasures of the world, and bit by bit were weakened in their godly desires and dedication to their Savior. And still others, being asked by God to carry the cross of suffering, struggle, or strife, forsook him and turned to other remedies and solutions. It's amazing, isn't it? We don't have to look too far to recognize the faces of these individuals, do we? In fact, the mirror is all the farther we have to go.

Many, but not all, deserted him. The twelve disciples remained, even when all the others turned their backs on Jesus in disgust and left him. To these faithful few Jesus now turns and addresses the question: "*You don't want to leave, too, do you?*" It's this question that prompts Peter to respond, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*"

My friends, if you are still a Christian, a child of God through faith in Jesus, a member of his family, then take a moment right now to thank God for that, "*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*" (Php 2:13). To become, to be, and to remain a child of God is solely the work of God the Holy Spirit, for the Scriptures plainly say, "*No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit*" (1 Cor 12:3).

But will you always remain faithful to your Lord and Savior? Every time you come across someone who has forsaken his faith, Jesus addresses to you this question: "*You don't want to leave, too, do you?*" His loving heart aches for those sheep that have foolishly and to their own great harm wandered from the fold. And Jesus is genuinely concerned that you remain true to him and don't follow the example of those who have fallen away.

Don't we all have to confess that on occasion—maybe even more than we care to admit—we find our minds rebelling when we hear in a sermon or a Bible class or read in our Bible at home one of Jesus' *"hard teachings,"* truths that clash with our limited human reason? Don't the commandments sometimes seem to be like a heavy chain restricting our freedoms? Aren't we often unhappy with the lot in life that God has given us—with the cross (or crosses) that he asks us to bear for Jesus' sake? For all these reasons and more, Jesus, who knows our hearts better than we do, asks, *"You don't want to leave, too, do you?"* May God graciously give us the strength to join our voices with Peter and ask, *"Lord, to whom shall we go?"*

2. When Peter responded to Jesus' question with his own, he wasn't really asking for information. It was his way of saying, "No, Lord, we will not go away. We will never leave you or forsake you. There is no one else to whom we want to go."

Can you and I answer any differently? If we were to forsake Christ, if we were to turn our backs on him, to whom or to what could we go? Who or what is there that makes the promises that Jesus makes and then comes through on them the way he does? So often, however, in our own way and in our own fashion, we do turn our backs on him. When we are unwilling to give up our pet sins; when we repeatedly refuse to feed our faith through Word and Sacrament; when we steal from him by not being forthright and faithful in our offerings; when we choose not to stand up for him when others misuse his name and ridicule his Word; when we talk about others behind their backs; when we see nothing wrong with alcohol and drug abuse and sexual immorality, we are forsaking Jesus. We need to realize and remember that every sin of thought, word and action is an outright violation of God's holy will and ought to be punished by him with eternal death and damnation in hell.

Peter said that he wouldn't forsake Jesus for anyone or anything, for he knew—in fact, he was absolutely convinced—that Jesus was the Christ, the long-promised and long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament. Speaking for himself and for the other disciples, Peter confessed, *"We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."*

Peter gave another reason why he and his fellow disciples wouldn't turn away from Jesus. He said, *"Lord, you have the words of eternal life."* The disciples had heard Jesus speak as no other man had ever spoken. They had, quite literally, heard him speak the words of eternal life. Throughout his earthly life and ministry, Jesus wasn't merely describing the joys of eternal life; he was actually obtaining them. Now, in the gospel, he offers and gives them to us. Those who by faith embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ possess

eternal life already in this life, and will never see or experience the torment and agony of hell. By trusting in Jesus as our divine Savior, we can be absolutely sure of being with him in heaven. Or, as the Apostle Paul once put it: *"I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day"* (2 Tm 1:12).

How can this be? When Jesus surrendered his life on the cross and cried out, *"It is finished"* (Jn 19:30), he was declaring to the world that his payment for the sins of the world was accomplished. To prove that this was so, he then rose from the dead three days later. This was his heavenly Father's stamp of approval on everything Jesus had done for the salvation of the world. In his letter to the Romans Paul the Apostle puts it this way: *"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"* (4:25). Jesus' death paid for our sins; his resurrection from the dead makes it sure. In his Word and sacraments, what we call the means of grace, he now offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. Those who believe this Word of God are his children and heirs of eternal life.

Dear friends, to whom shall we go but to Jesus, the Son of the living God, who alone has the words of eternal life? To leave him would mean turning our backs on the only sure life ever given to a dying world. It would mean resigning ourselves to hopelessness, helplessness, and despair. God forbid that any of us should ever commit such disastrous and damned foolishness. Together with Peter may each of us confess, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* Amen.