

## Evotional

**Sermon title: "Jesus and his disciples at Capernaum."**

**Speaker: Neil Durling.**

**Bible passages: John 6:60-71.**

**Date: 7.6.15.**

### **Message:**

#### **Too tough to swallow (60):**

On hearing that Jesus said they should eat his body and drink his blood, the wider group of disciples (who are loosely following Jesus), murmur behind Jesus' back. This teaching was hard/difficult to follow and accept, not to understand (it is important to remember that this was written at a time when Christians were being ejected from the Temple where they had worshiped alongside Jews for many years. Jews were tired of these Christian practices, such as communion, and had forced them out).

#### **Jesus challenges his disciples (61-65):**

Jesus tells this murmuring group that if they can't understand this basic imagery, harking back to the Passover, then how will they comprehend his ascension to heaven (mentioned six times in John: 3:13, 8:21, 16:10, 17:11, 20:17)! The whole gospel is in question here: Do we believe that Jesus came down to earth, is the son of God, feeds us with his flesh and blood, rose again and then ascended back up to heaven?

Jesus makes it clear that only the Spirit can give us this kind of life; not the flesh. For John "flesh" includes the best of human religion; we see this also with Nicodemus: Flesh gives birth to flesh and the Spirit to Spirit (John 3:6). Why can it only come from the Spirit? Because unbelief is natural and part of the fabric of being human. Also, before coming to faith we were dead in our sins, as the Apostle Paul said. It is God who draws us and God who breathes life into us. Although God draws us to himself we still have free will to make our own decision. We hear the cry of the man who said: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." (Mark 9:24)

#### **Some disciples leave Jesus (66):**

Instead of answering Jesus there is silence & they then leave. "From this time" can be read as "because of this" (teaching) many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. This turning is instant and permanent in the Greek tenses. Some Rabbis actually lectured their followers while they walked with them; these disciples no longer walked with Jesus. A Rabbi derived status from the success and loyalty of his disciples, and abandonment invited dishonour in the wider community. This is not a great day in Jesus' ministry...

#### **Jesus asks the Twelve if they want to leave (67):**

We see the group continue to narrow from "the crowd" (22, 24), to "The Jews"/unbelievers (41, 52) to "the disciples" (60) and now to the Twelve (67). When Jesus asks them if they "want" to leave him, this isn't just about their physical presence but, rather, about their hearts. I find most folk leave church and Jesus in their hearts and minds long before they physically walk out of the door. By offering an "out" Jesus tests his disciples and also gives them the freedom to leave.

#### **Simon Peter says "no" (68-69):**

They choose to stay and Peter touchingly says: "To whom shall we go?" All they have, at this stage, is Jesus. Peter declares that no-one else has the life-giving message of Jesus, and that he is the only source who could satisfy them. It seems believers are driven into the arms of faith. Some people tell me faith is a crutch for the weak, and I readily agree. Christianity is counter-cultural at a time when we have to have it all together and be a success. Christianity invites us to come as we are, in our brokenness, to Jesus.

#### **Jesus chose them but 1 will betray (70-71):**

Jesus' choosing of the Twelve was conscious and deliberate. And in their midst is a devil. This word can be interpreted as "slanderer" (also in 2 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 2:3). Judas is an adversary of God.

#### **Judas and Peter:**

John makes it very clear in this passage that Judas betrayed Jesus. But before we look down our noses at him we'd do well to remember that Jesus also called Peter 'Satan' (Mark 8:32-33). Although Peter shines in this passage, he too fails Jesus. The difference is that Judas hangs himself, whereas a skulking Peter accepts Jesus' forgiveness over a fish breakfast and is reinstated.

### **Questions:**

1. Am I one of the fringe disciples who follows Jesus when it suits me?
2. Why did Jesus let these half-hearted disciples follow him? Why did he let Judas betray him?
3. Am I like Peter or Judas?
4. If I am like Judas, in which ways do I "hang" (punish) myself when I betray Jesus?
5. The theologian Paul Tillich once said that becoming a Christian meant we needed to "Accept our acceptance". What do you understand by this?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Jesus, thank you that when I stuff-up, you forgive me. Amen.