

Sermon Theme: You Have the Words of Eternal Life
Sermon Text: John 6:60-69

Recently I was talking to someone around my age who told me they had just went to visit the doctor. I felt I should ask him what the reason was because as far as I had known he was in perfectly fine health. And he was. He just went to the doctor for his yearly check-up. It kind of caught me off guard because I'm one of those people who wait to see the doctor until I absolutely need to and have no other choice in the matter. Now, we can discuss later my doctor-attending habits and the flaws of waiting to get help until something bad happens. There are all too many examples in our lives—not just with physical health—where this is not a good practice and leads to much worse problems and issues. But the fact is, for so many different things, unless we are convinced we actually need something, we are less likely to make use of it. A door-to-door salesperson comes to your house pitching their product, if you are sure the vacuum you have is completely fine, then you won't listen to a single word they have to say. How often does a telemarketer call your phone and you immediately hang up once you hear who it is because you almost immediately are convinced you don't have any need for them? A good salesperson will convince you that your life is missing something and their product is going to fill that void. But if you already have what you need, then there's no need to go looking for something else, right?

The many disciples who were following Jesus were wrestling with this issue. This isn't just talking about the Twelve disciples but includes the large group of people who followed Jesus and were learning from him. Many heard what Jesus had said, but felt, "*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*" Without getting into the details of what exactly he said, Jesus had made it clear he had what they needed. They needed to be given eternal life and so they needed Jesus.

The problem was the people thought they already had eternal life. They were decent people who lived decent and good lives. They belonged to the right group of people; they were Jews. Because of who their ancestors were and because of the lives they lived they thought they had what they needed already. What Jesus said made no sense to them. It was a hard saying; in fact it was offensive to them—how can he say they didn't have what was needed? Who does he think he is to say they are not good enough; that he is right and they are wrong?

Notice Jesus isn't pushing these people away. Jesus wanted these people to follow him and wanted them to know his teaching. Even when v.64 tells us, "*Jesus had*

known from the beginning which of them did not believe and would betray him.” How patient Jesus is. How loving that he continually preached and taught each of them even when he knew who did not believe. In his love he knew each one needed him and so he would not pull himself from them.

And, yet, we humans have a terrible power: we can pull ourselves from Jesus. John says in verse 66 that *from that time many disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus*. They went back to their ordinary lives and to their former way of thinking and living. But it was more than the fact that this was a hard teaching. It's like in school when a student doesn't do their homework, they might give the excuse they didn't understand it. The teacher may ask, “Why didn't you ask for help?” There is usually a deeper issue than just not understanding. So it is with these people. They didn't understand Jesus' teaching because **they didn't want to** understand it. They were done learning from Jesus. He no longer was giving to them what they wanted. They weren't hearing what they were hoping to hear. Jesus was telling them that they needed him and him alone to have eternal life. He was telling them that what they had wasn't good enough. They needed something else. But the people did not want to hear it. They didn't understand or think they had a great need. They were convinced they were fine on their own and had no need for this Jesus. And so they walked away.

It's kind of scary at how easy that walking away is to do. We are taught to look out for that enemy the devil to come and snatch us away at any moment. During catechism class you might get the idea that someone is going to be questioning your faith at every moment. But the hardest temptation might be fighting against that idea that your relationship with Jesus isn't that big of a deal. If someone were in our faces against our faith, we would be ready to fight off those attacks. But more often that doesn't happen. More often it just doesn't matter to other people what you believe. You do what you want to do as long as it doesn't affect anyone else. What church body you belong to, what you believe doesn't matter—is the impression this world can give. And so the temptation is to become a lazy Christian who is not connected to God's Word, because it doesn't seem like your relationship with Jesus is as pressing a matter compared to everything else in your life. And as much as you know that is a lie, how we live and act, the decisions that we make can seem like we don't see a terrible need for him every day, in every moment of our lives. So easily one can just walk or wander away because they get out of the habit, it's not a priority, it stopped being really important. It rarely happens over night; much more common is this slowly drifting away.

Watching the crowds walk away, knowing they weren't coming back, Jesus turns to the Twelve, "*You don't want to leave too, do you?*" Jesus doesn't ask this question so that his disciples could give him a pick-me-up, give him some validation and consolation. He is testing the Twelve, "Are you going to follow the crowd? Are you going to go with the easy? Are you going to leave too?"

Jesus asks you, "You don't want to leave too, do you?" How difficult it is to fight off those times when we hear what God's Word has to say and **we don't want to** understand it. All too often God's Word is left behind and ignored when it tells you that a particular sin or lifestyle choice you are making is not God-pleasing. It's not what you want to hear, it doesn't agree with your ideas, so you close your ears to it.

The other problem is we have these selective memories that block out the bad and uncomfortable and focus on the good and pleasant. We know that we are sinners, but all too often we keep that truth from driving us to our knees in despair as we make excuses and give reasons for what we did. We know that we deserve death and punishment in hell, but only let that sting and that thought frighten us for a spare moment before maybe saying we aren't that bad. We know we need help, God's forgiveness, his love, but then repeatedly make decisions that pull us from him.

Take off those blinds from your eyes of faith that hide the truth. Stop listening to the lies this world tries to convince of and you tell yourself. Recognize the truth that you did not and cannot come to Jesus on your own. No, as Jesus said in v. 65, the Father made that decision for you and brought you to him. Recognize and say with Peter, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" There is plenty you can turn to. Do you, like many of those one-time-followers, turn to what makes sense? Do you listen to your rational mind that questions how could God's Word, how can prayer actually help a situation? Will you turn to your own actions and works to try and make up with God for what you have done wrong? Will you ignore the fact that your sins condemn you to eternity in hell; that on your own you do not have and cannot have eternal life? Or, will you listen to the truth of God's Word? To whom shall we go? There is no other place to turn. There is no other place you need to turn. You—that is Jesus—has the words of eternal life. God be praised, you don't have to go on a grand adventure searching for it; God reveals it to you right here in his Word. Jesus has what you need.

With Peter we can say, “*We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.*” By the power of the Holy Spirit working through this Word of God you have been brought to believe that Jesus died for your sins. By that Word it was made known to you that Jesus is the Holy One who is perfect in every way—tempted like you in every way including to doubt, to have less-than God-pleasing priorities, yet he was without sin—so that he could take your place and his death means something. That sin that condemns you, Jesus died for so that debt of sin is paid in full; you cannot be accused of any wrong in God’s courtroom. That sin that separates you from God making you his hate-filled enemy, Jesus died so that you have a relationship with God and calls you his child washed and cleansed in the waters of baptism. That sin that kills you, Jesus died so that you have the gift of God which is eternal life with him. It’s yours because God raised him from the dead on Easter morning and through faith he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus you have exactly what you need.

Cody and Dakota, today you make a solemn and serious promise before God and this congregation that you will not leave Jesus. Nothing else is more important than your relationship with God. There will be times when you may doubt it. There may come a time when you question how much you need that relationship or your Savior. But God gives you tools to convince you that it is true and to strengthen you when you doubt. By his Word God shows you your need for a Savior and by that Word he shows you that Savior. Study it; continue to grow in it. The more you are in God’s Word, the more connected you will be. And now you are invited to receive another tool. Come to the Lord’s Supper with me. Place your sins on Jesus knowing he has paid for them. With me and your brothers and sisters in Christ, receive the forgiveness of sins won for you and the strengthening of your faith in a special and unique way. By the power of the Holy Spirit you have come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. You have the words of eternal life; Jesus gives them to you through faith. Hold on to them. Amen.