

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title:

Lesson: Ephesians 6:10-20, John 6:56-69

John 6:56-69

⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming

arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

(Slide 1) Last week, we gathered for a Picnic Service at the Chalet. It was wonderful to see our three churches come together in one place, full of anticipation and excitement, to praise and worship God. I was particularly pleased to see many of you inviting your children, grandchildren, and families, creating a beautiful picture of three generations living together in God. And of course, the delicious food and the fun we had playing cornhole after the service made the day even more special.

I noticed how happy many of you were when I promised not to give a long sermon at the picnic service. Seeing your reactions, I felt two things: gratitude and a bit of guilt. I felt guilty for the times when my sermons may have been too long, but I'm also deeply grateful to all of you for listening patiently and bearing with me.

Today is the last Sunday of August, and it marks four full years since I began serving here. Reflecting on these past four years, I am filled with gratitude for the way you have embraced me as your pastor, despite my inexperience and the many things I still need to learn. I want to say thank you: Thank you for your love and support. I will continue to serve God and this parish with all my heart.

(Slide 2) As I prepared for today's service and message, I found myself reading and rereading the Gospel passage. Each time, I was struck by how incredible Jesus is. Yes, He is the Son of God, but the Jesus depicted in the Bible is also incredibly bold. He never hesitated to speak the truth, no matter the consequences, and He viewed the world through God's perspective, not through the eyes of people. As I continued reading John 6, I couldn't help but feel my own limitations and shortcomings.

While I have many strengths, I realize how inadequate I am compared to Jesus, who displayed such courage and boldness without fearing what others thought. In John 6, we see Jesus performing miracles—healing many, feeding over five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish, and walking on water

to calm a storm that terrified His disciples. These miracles and teachings made Jesus famous, and many followed Him.

However, despite the large crowds that followed Him, it seems they were still trapped in their old ways of thinking and were not ready to accept the truth that was right in front of them. Jesus introduced Himself as the "bread of heaven" and said that whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood would live forever. But they didn't understand what He meant. And when He pointed out that their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness but still died, they likely felt a strong sense of rejection. The Torah, the sacred books written by Moses, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, was held in the highest regard, so when Jesus suggested that their ancestors ate manna but died, many probably felt uncomfortable, if not outright angry.

Moreover, when Jesus said that only through Him could they have eternal life and come to God, many might have thought He was committing blasphemy or even considered Him a heretic.

If I were in that situation, I might have compromised or avoided the confrontation to keep people from being upset with me. But Jesus never compromised or backed down; He spoke the truth boldly from beginning to end, with His eyes fixed not on people's approval, but on God's.

Despite the large crowds that followed Jesus, they couldn't accept the truth because of their ingrained ways of thinking. They were swept away by rumors and gossip, and they turned their backs on Jesus and left.

(Slide 3) This story reminds me that the majority opinion or decision isn't always right. People often feel comfortable following the majority, and I, too, sometimes find the majority opinion more reasonable or persuasive. There are times when choosing a minority opinion feels uneasy, and I get a bad feeling about it. I imagine people in Jesus' time felt similarly.

Some people were undoubtedly uncomfortable, upset, or even angry with Jesus' teachings. Perhaps these were people who were poorly informed about the law or were experts in the law. However, most of the crowd likely didn't fully understand either the law or Jesus' teachings.

Caught between the truth of Jesus and the law, people had to choose, but they were unsure of what to choose, so they were likely waiting to see what others would decide. For them, the law was sacred, while Jesus' teachings were new and

unfamiliar. In the end, they chose their traditions, which couldn't give them eternal life, over Jesus.

I don't think this is just a story about others; it feels like my story, our story. We live in an age where information and knowledge flood our lives through media outlets, social media, and the internet. But at the same time, there is an abundance of misleading information that can blind us and lead us astray. And what's even more troubling is how difficult it is to stand firm and discern the truth when someone is determined to deceive or manipulate us.

(Slide 4) The Apostle Paul, who understood our weaknesses well, says in Ephesians: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Take up the shield of faith... Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit."

Putting on the full armor of God, taking up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit means walking with God 24/7, 365 days a year. A life of walking with God, a life of close fellowship with Him, comes from God's Word and from all kinds of prayers and requests. We cannot walk with God without prayer and reading His Word. We must pray every moment to be protected from evil thoughts and bad feelings.

(Slide 5) We must cling to God at all times. When you pray, try praying like this: "Dear God, have mercy on me." "Lord, have pity on me."

While many people were leaving Jesus, Peter kept his faith. How was he able to do that? Although we know he would later betray Jesus, at that moment, Peter seemed to be the one closest to Jesus, having the most intimate fellowship with Him. That's why, when so many others abandoned the truth and followed the crowd, Peter could stand firm, discern the truth, and confess his faith in Jesus, saying: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Friends, we are weak. We cannot see what lies ahead. Sometimes we unknowingly accept wrong information, and sometimes we are led astray. But we must not remain in our weakness. Though we are weak, our God is strong. Friends, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. By praying and having fellowship with God, by reading the Word of Life, gain eyes that can discern what is true and what should be followed. Only our God, Jesus Christ, is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.