

John 6:56-69  
August 22, 2021

## The Confession

The turning point of the ministry of Jesus occurs at just this place in John's Gospel, right after Jesus has fed the multitude and walked on the water, and engaged in a conversation about his true identity, in which he said, "I am the Bread of Life," leading to the confession spoken by Peter, "You are the Holy One of God."

In the other three gospels this turning point looks quite different, but it is still recognizable. Take Mark's version as an example, very similar to Matthew and Luke;

"Who do people say that I am? Jesus asks. They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, still others say one of the prophets." "But what about you," he asked, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." (Luke, "The Christ of God," Matthew, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.")

What does it mean for us to believe, and to reach the point where we are able to confess, that Jesus is "The Holy One of God?"

The first thing to say is that it means we acknowledge the spiritual nature of life in general *and* the supremacy of the spiritual aspects of life over the physical. We are more than the sum of our biological

parts. Life refuses to be explained in terms of the functioning of the body, the heart, lungs, the workings of the central nervous system, the brain. We are also more than the sum of our ideological and philosophical beliefs. In the end, even relationships do not define us.

So it is no real surprise that when Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life," and further insisted that his body must be eaten, he went on to spiritualize it. "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit, and they are life." For some of the followers of Jesus, this concept was too much, and they left him.

It has never been easy to separate the spirit from the flesh, body from soul. The two are linked, they can be distinguished from each other, but not easily separated. The modern emphasis on mental health may serve as an illustration of this dilemma. We are learning that the impact of our experiences extends beyond the physical ramifications and affects also our emotional and mental health. PTSD and other maladies speak to the psycho-physical unity of our lives.

This encounter between Jesus and his followers is poignant. He asks them, "Do you not also want to go?" When something is poignant, it means that it is not only true, but that there is an element of sadness in it. In this case, the sadness lies in the loss of the ones who could no longer remain with Jesus, in the presence of the betrayer among those who did

remain, and in the memory that before it was finished, they all abandoned him.

Rejection hurts, no matter the circumstances. There is pain in the tone of Jesus when he says, “are you also going to leave?” People are sometimes so persistent in their attempts to avoid it that they will do almost any song and dance to attract and be a part of a crowd, mistaking the presence of a crowd for the acceptance that feeds the soul.

We must admit that churches are all the time asking after bigger crowds and sometimes have been willing to sacrifice dignity and integrity in the process. It is not only in religious circles that this phenomenon occurs. It is part of the human story.

On this 40th year since I graduated high school I am reminded of a story, I am sure I have told it before - but occasional repetition is not always a bad thing.

When I was in 11th grade I was in a big study hall class in which we never studied but socialized instead. There was a girl in that group that began coming to my church that year. At the end she graduated and went to college. The next year, after I had graduated she came home from her freshman year and showed up at church one Sunday.

After the normal greetings, I asked her if she kept up with anyone. She name a couple of people. I started asking about some of the people in that study hall, when she stopped me to say that, no, she didn't know

about any of them, and then she said she didn't care if she ever saw them again. My response to her is what interests me, I told her I knew exactly how she felt.

I don't know what we did all those years in school together, find subtle ways to reject one another I guess, so that when it was over, we were glad to go our separate ways. I am not sure what we gained, but we lost each other, as friends, for most of the rest of our lives. That is part of the human story.

At some point we must stop doing things that drive us away from each other, and widen the circle of those we accept and allow ourselves to be accepted by, until no one is left out. That may seem idealistic and utopian, maybe so, but it is worth a lifetime's pursuit.

Though rejected, Jesus proclaimed God's acceptance. That is a nourishing message. It stands as at least part of what Jesus means when he says, “I am the Bread of Life.” If it doesn't yet solve the problem of all the world's rejections, it definitely sets us on the way towards, what an only be called Life, with a capital L, in its highest and holiest sense. Like Peter, we confess, “You are the Holy One of God.”

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