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**Pentecost 13 B, August 18, 2024**

**“To Whom Shall We Go?”**

**Read: John 6:51–69 and/or Memorize: John 6: 68 – 69 NLT.**

When we talk about Jesus and His disciples, I often think what is in our mind is that small group of 12, but by this time in the ministry of Jesus, Biblical scholars believe He had attracted well over 500 disciples. They were riding the high of thinking that Jesus was the Messiah, but they totally misunderstood what that meant.

They were thinking they would become the bigwigs in the government they expected Jesus to establish. That was what they thought the Messiah was going to do. That’s why so many were following Him, for the payoff they would get out of following Him,

But then things went wrong. To many of them, it seemed that Jesus started talking crazy. All the stuff about eating His body and drinking His blood just sounded weird. He was doing so well before, healing and restoring people, becoming so well-known that when he made his move to establish the new kingdom, the people would rise up in rebellion against the Romans, fulfilling their hopes and expectations about getting rid of them.

Now, He was making everybody uncomfortable. They started saying that His teachings were too hard. They couldn't figure out how they could possibly continue to follow Him. So, they did exactly what people do when the leader doesn’t do what they want, they started leaving. Not just one or two, but whole bunches of them. Pretty soon, all that were left were the 12.

Jesus must've been wondering about them, because He turned and said, "Do you also want to leave?" Peter spoke right up and gave the answer that they all needed to hear, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God" It's hard to believe that any other disciple would've been so quick to answer in that way.

This sudden, unqualified remark could only have come from Peter. At the mere mention of leaving Christ, Peter’s soul got on fire, and the words in his heart overcame the slower process of intellect. He spoke with the voice of one who experienced the power of the words of eternal life: "Lord, to whom would we go?"

**Would that question be just as appropriate for us to ask as it was for Peter? The powerful temptation to let go of our Christian commitment is always with us. After all, commitment to Christ can be an expensive proposition, and those whose faith is weakest will deprive God before they will deprive themselves.**

**True Christian commitment is costly. It takes time; it takes money; it can take your life. It might deprive you of some of the creature comforts that many cherish, especially at this time, when so many believe that it is more important to focus on their own desires and wants.**

**The temptation to forsake Jesus is always great. It is in those times we hear Jesus asking, "Do you also want to leave?" The wise heart will respond just as Peter's did, "Lord, to whom would we go?"**

**Give that question careful consideration before you answer. If a real estate agent offered you a substantial sum for your home, above anything you could ever imagine, your heart would probably jump in anticipation. But then, you would need to deal with the question of "what's next?"**

**Even if the house you live in is not everything you wish, you would still want to think carefully about what kind of house you would be able to buy. Should we be less careful about our faith than we are about our home? Are you a person who would be more concerned about a shelter for your physical body than for your soul?**

**It is infinitely easier to ask questions than it is to answer them; to pull things down than it is to build them up. This is one of the earliest lessons we want to learn, and not forget. This applies to every aspect of life, but there is a special focus on the highest questions that engage the mind.**

**For example, isn't it easier to waste money than to earn it? Isn't it easier to ruin a picture than to paint one? You can pluck a flower from its stem, but can you put it on again? It is easier to tempt a person than to save them; easier to ruin a life than to win that life for Jesus.**

**So, you want to be careful when people offer you alternatives, especially when they sound too good to be true. That is always a sign of a scam. Some have a genius for destruction. They are most unhappy when there is nothing to break. If you listen closely, you notice that they seem to like to be quarrelsome about everything. They undermine foundations; teach no distinct or positive truth; they give the lie to all faith and distrust upon all experience.**

**Look at how easy their task is compared to the duty of the Christian teacher. A malicious person can do more mischief in one hour than a genius can repair in a lifetime.**

Let a vandal have his way for one night in any church that was slowly raised through generations and centuries; in the morning you might find a small heap. So it is with spiritual vandals, whose main contribution is ridicule. In the face of this kind of person, you might ask that question found in today's reading: "Lord, to whom would we go?"

What do you do when you give up on religion. What can you do when you give up on God? Think about that. What can you do when you give up on God? It is called atheism. It is the belief that there is no God, no higher power. Is it truly an option in this world?

If you put away the mystery of God, you get the greater mystery of godlessness in return. How would you account for all things created? Have you ever seen a chair make itself? Some atheists say that the sun created itself. The clothing you have on today had a manufacturer, but according to the atheist your soul had none.

We could go on and on, but I think you get the point. We would have to accept that all these things have come into being without a creator. Can you accept such an absurdity? Were we to accept it as the foundation of life, we would lose all self-respect. Faith would be displaced by intellectual madness.

Some hold to the thought that people are continually getting better. If you just give them enough time, people will stop killing each other, abusing each other and will instead, help each other. And then we hear the news or learn on social media about another shooting in Rochester, or some other violent event, and we realize that people are not getting better. People are still sinners; God says that all sin separates us not only from Him, but from each other.

If not Christ, to whom shall you go? And, why not Christ? Can you improve on His teachings? Can you explain the marvels of creation with any more satisfaction than the writer of Genesis did when he wrote, "In the beginning God created . . ." You cannot save yourself. You understand that because you follow Jesus.

Throughout history, many still echo Peter's searching question today: if not to you, "Lord, whom would we go?" There is no satisfactory, or satisfying, alternative. Only Jesus can satisfy the deepest longings of our heart; only He is the way, the truth and the life.

An African tribesman was leading a group of European explorers through a particularly dense patch of jungle. After hours of traveling, one of the explorers remarked, "For the life of me, I can detect no path through this jungle. How can we be sure you're going the right way?" The African answered, "I am the way. You will simply have to trust that the jungle is my home and that I will not get you lost."

**Might we say the same about Jesus. He said of Himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father, except through me." If you follow Him, you will not be lost. But perhaps you are feeling pulled in two different directions? Perhaps you're struggling with the feeling that Jesus may want too much from you? I beg you to consider this question very seriously: "to whom would you go?"**

**If you follow Jesus because He is the only way, then follow Him with the seriousness of one devoted to Him who gave His life for you and all people. Why go with anyone else, when, as Simon Peter says, "you have the words of eternal life. We have come to know and believe that you are the holy one of God. without you, there is nothing else."**

**Count me in: If you are a follower of Jesus, how will you lead others to Him?**