

19 August 2018

## What Do You Believe About Jesus?

Text: John 6:51-69

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What do you believe about Jesus? Feels like an odd question to be asking a family of Christians who have gathered to worship our Lord this morning. But is it an odd question? What is it you believe about Jesus?

Each and every one of us have in our minds a mental image of who Jesus is, and maybe even what He looks like. Every believer does. Across America, you can find in homes, artwork depicting an image of Jesus. Sometimes that artwork is in the image of a painting, a drawing, a book, etc. But each piece gives a glimpse into what it is we believe about Jesus.

Maybe what you believe about Jesus is based upon the pictures you've seen. Or it could be that your beliefs center around how you've listened to Him being portrayed in music. Sometimes our belief about Jesus has to do with Hollywood and how it is they show Him on the big screen or maybe even on stage. And maybe what you believe about Jesus has to do with what you hear and see in His Word and in His church. But I ask you again, what do you believe about Jesus?

The disciples in our Gospel text this morning, from the Gospel According to St. John, faced the very same question? What is it they believed about Jesus? By this time in Jesus' ministry, He had many followers, not just the original twelve. Some were followers who had been fed with fish and bread on a hill with thousands of others. Others were in the towns that Jesus had visited, they had seen Him casting out demons, making the blind to see, and the lame to walk. And everywhere Jesus went, it seems that not only did the crowds of followers grow, but they started going where He was, as if He were some superstar and they were groupies going from concert to concert.

Regardless of where they met Jesus or what they saw Him do, they came searching for something. Maybe they searched for someone who would listen to them? It could be that they came looking for Jesus who would lead a great military rebellion against the Roman government, overthrowing it, and placing himself on the throne. It could be that they also came because they needed someone to believe in, that would never leave them nor forsake them. For whatever the reason, they came.

Yet our text tells us this morning that some of these followers would begin to question what it is they believed about Jesus. They were fine when He was helping others. They God liked how He fed them. They enjoyed His company for He was kind and spoke gently to them. But, when Jesus began to talk about "eating His flesh and drinking His blood", some of these devout followers began to lose interest quickly.

"Alright Jesus, what are you doing? Why are you talking so crazy like? Just stick with what you've been doing and stop talking about eating flesh and drinking blood. Do that, and you'll be ok with me". But He didn't. And because He didn't, because He continued to talk about those things they didn't like, they left. They packed up their belongings, grabbed their families, put their personal effects on the back of a donkey and they left for home. They left because what they believed about Jesus didn't coincide with the Gospel of Jesus. What did they believe about Jesus? That He was one thing and they wanted another. They believed He was a great and generous host at a party. They enjoyed His company and they believed Him to be, in all honesty, nothing more than someone who provided good entertainment and catered to their wants. This they believed about Jesus.

But it is important at this point to understand something. What the followers who left believed about Jesus had nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus. God's Word never changes. It is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The fact that they believed something contrary to what Jesus said is ironic too given the miracles they had seen Jesus perform. Yet they failed to see that His words matched His actions. He was both talking the talk, and walking the walk. Jesus spoke with authority, "I am the Bread of Life", because He was. But unfortunately, they were asleep in the light.

You too are the same way. You have heard Jesus preached to you. You've felt Him on your lips in His Holy meal for you. You've been covered and marked by Him in the waters of baptism with marks of the cross placed upon your forehead and your hearts. You've heard His message, "Repent, and believe". And you have. Not by any work of your own but by God's work in your heart. You've seen Jesus too work in our own life and in the lives of others.

You believe this about Jesus because you have read and heard His Word every week. You've come to Sunday School, Bible School, Bible studies, and confirmation. And in doing so the Holy Spirit continually strengthens and preserves you in body and soul into life everlasting.

Yet sadly, some who believe have left Jesus too. They've stopped coming to church because they quit believing that there is anything in it for them. Maybe they believe God

abandoned them in a time of need and so they just stopped coming all together. Or perhaps they've been offended by something another person has said or did to them. Maybe they have even offended someone else and their pride and stubbornness won't allow them to go to that person and confess and ask for forgiveness. Suddenly, everything they've been taught and have heard about Jesus seems to have gone away.

Some of our young people have left Jesus as well. They have come to believe that it's not popular to be a Christian, that it's uncool to identify oneself as a follower of Jesus, that there is nothing in church for them anymore. So they go, leaving behind the faith of their parents and ancestors, and they find their own way, discovering a new god for themselves, someone or something that will take away their pain, heartbreak, and loneliness. Usually in this case, some of their unbelief about Jesus is a result of their parents' unbelief about Jesus as well.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not be discouraged, for the same Words that Jesus spoke to His followers then are the same words of promise for you today. He is God who loves you. He is God who will never leave or forsake you. He is the God of the Bible who declares to you that your sins are forgiven and that you have eternal life in Heaven with Him. He is God who is closer than a brother. He is God who is your Good Shepherd. He is God who is the Bread of Life and the Living Water. He came in the flesh, for you, to tell you these things Himself. And because He is, you can take comfort in knowing that His promises for you will never change. His death on the cross made sure of that. His victory over death, hell, and the grave for you and in your place, gives you a seat at His table, at the wedding feast that is yet to come.

Does that mean that your faith will never be little, that you will never sin? No. But what it means is that when your faith is little, when you sin, that the Savior of the cross is still there for you, pursuing you with arms wide open, like a father welcomes his long lost son, your sins forgiven. And because your sins are forgiven, you can answer the question of "what do you believe about Jesus", the same way that St. Peter did in our text this morning, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Jesus is whom you can go too when life's troubles get you down and Satan continues to whispers His lies into your ears. Jesus is the Word of eternal life, for you. You can believe what Jesus says to you, not because I say you can, but because God has always said the same thing, "I am your Creator, Your God, Your Father, who loves you and who gave His life for you."

Friends, may you continue to live as faithful followers of Jesus, secure in His grace and mercy. Now, and forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.