

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace, from God our Father
and from our Lord and Saviors Jesus Christ... Amen**

Today we finish a series of sermons based in John chapter 6, working with Jesus as the bread of life. Next week we'll be going back to the gospel of Mark. For the past five weeks we have talked about different ways we experience Jesus as nourishment for our souls.

We've talked about the feeding of the five thousand, the miracle of abundance and sharing... We talked about how Jesus' teaching makes our lives meaningful, how forgiveness is reconciling, how love is connecting and including... And of course, this is only the tip of the iceberg. And perhaps you've experienced Jesus in other life-giving ways as well-- we will never be done talking about all the ways Jesus is nourishment for us.

In our reading today we encounter a scandal, an offense. The Greek work is "scandalon," another name for it might be a stumbling block. This is one of those intellectual things that you can't accept. It doesn't make any sense. It's one of those, make or break moments. Either you accept it and go along, or you reject it and part ways.

Jesus is saying eat my flesh and drink my blood, and whoever eats of me will live because of me.

Some of the disciples are complaining, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" Jesus asked them straight up, "Does this offend you?" In fact, some of those very people described as disciples, have been with Jesus for some time.

And as our text says, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him." They abandoned him. I think the text accurately reflects their reaction.

Now, let's be honest, if someone were to come in here one Sunday morning and say, "eat my flesh and drink my blood," what would you think? If we were to put ourselves in the shoes of those people who were hearing Jesus... This whole idea of devouring Jesus is not only strange,

it's shocking. The gospel of John is very deliberate about this. As we noticed last week Jesus says this, six different ways in seven short verses.

I think the writer of John wants us to seriously consider what it means to devour Jesus. And of course, not literally, but metaphorically. The act of devouring another person is fundamental violence.

As the story of Jesus unfolds, he will be devoured by the chief priests and religious establishment. The gospel of John wants us to pay attention to how Jesus will be devoured, and to see ourselves complicit in doing that. Jesus says, eat my flesh and drink my blood, intentionally, deliberately, exactly so you can see how you do that to others.

Quick story... I was riding the motorcycle to text study in Cannon Falls Wednesday morning. I was going through the intersection of highway 19 and Mainstreet, when I saw a beautiful blue BMW LT 1200 motorcycle parked close to the intersection. It caught my eye! I would love to have one of those bikes! It was all rigged out for touring.

Those motorcycles are amazing, heated seats, heated grips, cd players, gps, cruise control, you name it. And I have to admit, next to my bike, it was really cool. And truth be told, I was coveting it...

And I began thinking to myself, boy the lucky guy who owns that, he must be rich and really knowledgeable about motorcycles. And then, under my breath I whispered, "He's probably spoiled..." And if you have a motorcycle like that, I'm sorry!

But can you see how quickly and mindlessly Judgments happen? And truth is, I was a little startled... It's one thing to think something like that; and it's another thing to say it. I thought to myself, what did you just do? Shame on you... Thank goodness no one heard me!

And that little “thing” bothered me. I like to think I’m above those petty little judgments, but obviously I’m not. I was taking a small bite out of someone I didn’t even know. Truth is, I’m just jealous, and not too different than the Pharisees and Sadducees being jealous of Jesus...

Another quick story... My family name of Portinga is unique... It’s actually a non-sense name... it literally means, son of a door... Inga means belonging to-- or son of... And Port simply means door. The name originated in 1811 when Napoleon required a census of what is a northern province of Holland.

Three brothers came up with the name, and I like to think it was their passive-aggressive way of telling the French to take a hike... Something like, you can take your dumb census stuff and show yourself out! But we’ll never know the truth...

Because it’s a nonsense name, every Portinga in the whole world is related to each other. We have the family genealogy and history going back to the origin of the name.

One of the original brothers, my great, great, great, great grandfather, Rinse, married a woman named Teatske, and they had four sons. They owned an Inn at the edge of the town. Rinse died young. And tragically, his wife Teatske was murdered.

The written history of my family includes one very interesting comment. It says, and I quote, “Teatske was murdered, likely by Amsterdam Jews who stayed overnight in her hotel, who did it never got caught.”

Every time I see that comment, it makes me wince and I can hardly believe it. Not the part about her being murdered, I’m talking about the part where the writer somehow feels compelled to blame the Jews from Amsterdam.

And it makes me wonder if Teatske was scapegoated, if maybe she was murdered by some group in town, and exactly because she gave refuge to Jewish people. We’ll never know...

The point, is that the writer of my family history was making a seemingly innocent comment, and yet it is a highly prejudiced accusation. And a mere hundred plus years later, many such seemingly innocent judgments exploded into the sentiment that would fuel the holocaust, where 6-7 million Jewish people were systematically killed. Small judgments like small fires can get out of hand... Big systematic evil resides in many tiny judgments...

If there's one thing I've learned from reading the bible, it's that human beings are very good at judging, blaming, criticizing, condemning, accusing, finger pointing, stoning, crucifying... And not only are we good at these things, we're also so blind about our participation in these things.

And it is exactly this blindness that is the problem. Human beings devour each other with our words all the time, and we keep ourselves in the dark about this truth. Because we think it's the righteous thing to do...

Jesus tells his disciples, "eat my flesh and drink my blood." Jesus will be devoured. He will be betrayed, accused and killed... Jesus explains this to his disciples over and over again. And the disciples have a hard time understanding this—they don't seem to get it, they just can't see it! It's a scandal, it's offensive...

Covetousness seems so innocent and yet it leads to murderous hearts, where we devour one another. Just look at our politics these days... And so it goes for us human beings, constantly, endlessly in conflict and disagreement. And I have to wonder, is this really God's intention for us?

And I have to say-- Absolutely not! Jesus is pointing us, is pointing humanity, down a different path. Jesus is devoured *exactly* by our murderous tendencies, *exactly* so we can see ourselves in a mirror... As Jesus said, "so whoever eats me will live because of me."

It's about opening our eyes to see our hurtful tendencies and judgments for what they are. It's about noticing my stupid comment about the owner of that motorcycle. It's about seeing how I

contribute to the systematic judging of other people and cultures. It's about being able to see my own evil.

Our reading from Ephesians put it this way, "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness"

And when we see how our words devour and destroy, repentance happens... Words of judgment are replaced with words of peace and kindness. Whereas the Kingdom of Humanity is good at judging, finger pointing, endlessly devouring one another. The Kingdom of God is about welcoming in, belonging, inclusion, love, mercy and forgiveness. Can you see the difference?

This is all about the fundamental transformation of our hearts; a completely different way of being in the world. And we pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."

And the good news today is that this is God's work and God's intention. Jesus came to lead us out of our murderous ways, and into a way of eternal life... Through Jesus, God has welcomed all of us into a new kind of kingdom.

And as God has welcomed us, we in turn reach out to welcome others. We welcome people who are different than us... Those who are hungry... Those who are poor... tall and short, young and old, Democrats and Republicans, because in God's eyes, All Are Welcome... Jesus is indeed the bread of life, nourishment for all, and nourishment for eternal life.

Amen.