

**Where Would We Go?  
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1 King 8:1,6,10-11; 22-30; 41-43  
Joshua 24:1-2; 14-18  
John 6:56-71

“Many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the holy One of God.”

I wonder what we would have done on the shores of the Galilee that day. Would we have been one of the few who stayed? Or would we be one of the many who walked away when Jesus’ teaching got too tough. The crowds have already begun to turn away but now the turning is happening by those who claimed to believe.

Jesus' teaching about the Bread of Life provides a reference point for us would-be disciples. His first disciples find, "this teaching difficult" and they are frightened by the price of proclaiming life! Like many of us in similar circumstances, they express their fear and resistance - under their breath! Perhaps they think Jesus won't know or won't hear their debates but he confronts them head on. He claims that if they do not believe they have not been granted faith through God because faith is a gift of God not of human achievement.

I think that is one of the hardest things for us to understand in this generation of self-achievement. How can something be worth anything if we have not created or done something to achieve it?

Perhaps this isn't a new struggle in faith. Perhaps this was a struggle for balance Solomon was trying to find as well. In Solomon's day they had the Arc of the Covenant which they placed in the temple, or the dwelling place or the house of God.

I can't imagine it would have been any different than it is today when we build our sanctuaries or temples. Solomon in all his faith and glory attempted to build a beautiful temple to honour God. And like we would today he might have had just a bit of pride in that. He might have thought this act would bring him into better standing with the holy. He might have thought, now God will understand how faithful I am?

The temple (or house of God) after all was for the people the place where God abided, the point of contact between heaven and earth. I don't think it is necessarily wrong to want to build a beautiful house to honour God but with Solomon we must understand God is larger than whatever we can create or imagine. When we build our places or worship, or come to our sanctuaries we are reminded that even Solomon prayed in dedication to a God beyond, a God from the temple to the earth to all of the heavens because God cannot

be contained. God cannot be restricted to our churches nor to our beliefs in how it should be. And yet God accommodates us in many ways because we in our humanity need a stable place, a place of contact, a way of framing and understanding our God.

And in the New Testament that is who Jesus is, the new covenant and the new temple. Jesus is the place where God dwells, the point of contact between the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. So Jesus is the place to turn to meet with God. That is what the whole of the book of John is trying to say. That is what this chapter 6 that we have been reading for weeks is all about. Jesus is the way to come to know God in a way that brings eternal life. God directs us to Jesus through his spirit. If we are nourished by him then we will know fullness. For there is no achievement, no amount of money we can make, no award that we can win that will satisfy our deepest longings forever. Jesus said “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” In the days of these teachings the spirit was known to be life and power and the flesh was death. And yet Jesus says that in God you as human beings in your flesh can know fullness of life, eternal life.

Life or eternal life in the gospel of John is about quality, not quantity. Unfortunately eternal life is one of those concepts that is often misunderstood. I used to understand eternal life with God as something that began after I died. But it is so much more than that. Eternal life is never ending life with God that begins here and now, that began long ago. Jesus said I have come that you might have fullness of life, life abundant, life now. The main point of eternal life is a life nourished, and filled by God today.

One author writes “Eternal life is the inimitable life that the disciples found in the presence of Christ, where there were no barriers and no limits. It was the “real thing,” the superlative-life that people have longed for throughout the ages. It is the life for which the world was made and for which humans came into being. It is fellowship with God and with each other, where love is the prime essence. Eternal life is sharing in the Jesus thing. It is Wow Life!”<sup>1</sup>

“Where else can we find that kind of quality life?” “Is there anything else you can do to achieve or create it?”

What are the alternatives? What does most of our society try?

Individualism and self-pride, most find that gets lonely.

Consumerism is what most choose today. But with our economy many have found this faith failing them quickly. And for those who haven’t lost in recent years will likely eventually find out that in surrounding oneself with more and more and more for fullness of life, there is never enough, the needs and desires never end.

What about Hedonism – the pursuit of pleasure. This is attractive and yet it too quickly becomes dangerous because adventures need to get more seductive. That is where our

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Prewer, Uniting Church in Australia.

prominent culture of drugs, drinking, partying, and sexual adventures come from but unfortunately the day that one is eternally satisfied never comes.

It's not that I'm so prudish or holy that I don't desire things, or pleasures, but I have also come to know there is so much more. Today's scriptures call us back to God. They point us to the temple in part because it is in that place that we are reminded of the holy, and yet 'The celebration of the temple regularly points beyond itself to the reality of God who is the real source of life and real focus of trust.'<sup>2</sup> Our scriptures point us to the fact that God is not only in the Arc, but on the Mountain with Moses, and with Joshua and his family. God is in the incarnation of Jesus, in the lives of the disciples, in our church and on our mountaintops, in our very ordinary lives.

And Jesus calls us to more than acceptance. Jesus calls us to transformation in our belief. Jesus offers fullness of life and love and joy that never ends. Dan Nelson says "to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is synonymous with the words to welcome, accept, receive, believe into and live."<sup>3</sup>

It's not in our church, or specific religion that we find life it is in God, in Jesus, in Christ, in complete love, acceptance and grace. No other thing will satisfy our hunger for life. No other person, place, theology or theory will suffice. We must look beyond ourselves and what we can create. Where can we go from here? There are a lot of options but I am going to do my best to follow the words of Simon Peter and follow The Holy God who offers life. How will I do that? Well personally I am going to need to come to church, and a time of worship regularly. I'm going to need to get together with others and talk about God and faith and life and belief. I'm going to need to center myself individually and in the presence of others. One author called church our human focus place or base camp. We need this sort of place to help ground and solidify our faith and belief. But in this place I long to meet a God that directs me in every place and moment of my ordinary life, that I might be nourished to fullness. Bruggeman says "the temple or the church is the access point to the reality of God. But God is always and everywhere with us in our very lives, our sacred ground, holy ground...for wherever we are we are indeed at home with God."<sup>4</sup>

What if we were at Galilee that day? Where would have gone? Jesus calls us to him, to go to God. To be nourished by the holy. May it be so.

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<sup>2</sup> Brueggman, "[At Home with God,](#)" Kate Huey, Weekly Seeds, i.UCC.org, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Sermon Nuggets, Lindy black. Textweek.com

<sup>4</sup> IBID