

Lent Day 12

Tuesday February 27, 2018

Reading: John 6:41-71

⁶⁵ He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Reflection

It's interesting that in our day and age, we the church are so often desperate to attract people to come and join us that we feel like we've failed if they don't stay. But, Jesus seems determined at every turn to alienate people and he doesn't seem all that concerned if and when they turn away from him. What's the difference between us? Are we loving, nice, kind, caring and godly? Is he cold, callous, unkind, uncaring and wicked? Well, of course you already the answer is no. We Christians would never characterize Jesus in those ways. Instead, we do selective reading in order to produce a much kinder and gentler Jesus. A Jesus meek and mild. We try to recreate Jesus into our image, into an image we think will be far more palatable to the people we view as consumers of our goods; consumers of our Jesus.

Rather than read around these passages with a sense of embarrassment, let's take our Lord at his word that he only does what he sees the Father do and says what the Father tells him. Which means Jesus is doing and saying exactly what the Father wills him to. In short, Jesus is good. Then there is purpose in this scene and in the other places where Jesus seems willfully upsetting. Sifting is happening. This metaphor is used many times in scripture. A worker takes a tool scoops a load of grain and tosses it up into the air. The grain which is heavy falls down but the chaff (outer casing) is light, stays up and blows away. Leaving only what is good and useful and expelling what is not. Jesus always casts a broad net — after all he has come to his people Israel and his good news is for them all. But, as he goes he sifts; are you wheat or chaff? It is a time of testing; a time of choosing. Do you believe? Will you believe? Faith is a word we use often but it has become unrooted from the word faithfulness — to hold true to someone or something. To have faith in Jesus is to stand by Jesus no matter what and if there is never a time where walking away is a real option then our saying we have faith means fairly little. The flip side of that is there is risk too. We might actually walk away. According to what I've said so far that would be okay, even good.

Why would walking away be good? Well, it's not really good, but it's better than thinking we have faith when we don't. John Wesley liked to preach a sermon called *The Almost Christian*. A person can learn to walk, talk, pray, sit and stand like a Christian, but not actually have a saving faith in Christ. That is what's bad and it would be better to have that revealed — the atheist is in a much more hopeful condition than the almost Christian because they know what they are not. So, when times of testing come — and they will come — will you stand or will you withdraw? If only the Father can enable us, then pray to the Father to stand faithful when tested.

Prayer

Son of Man who gave his life for us, thank you for the bread that you have given to the world so it can be remade. Thank you for sifting us, not allowing us to delude ourselves into a false hope, but insisting we cling only to our true hope which is you. Father make us true Christians and not almost. Amen.