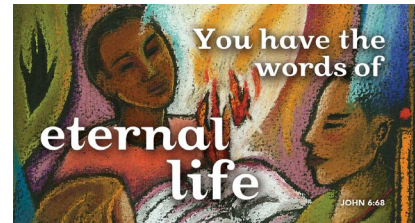


Pastor John Kepler
August 22, 2021
John 6:58-69



"Make Up Your Mind!"

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from Almighty God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is a simple fact that our lives are made up of countless decisions, that there is no such thing as a human being simply floating along in the stream of life with no conscious participation. Each day I have to decide such things as:

- what to eat (how many Weight Watcher points is that apple fritter?),
- what to wear (a difficult decision for those of us who are clothing challenged...ask my wife),
- whether or not to shave or wash my hair (retirement has given me more options),
- perhaps some have jotted down a few reminders for the day on an i-Phone or, my technological preference, a 3x5 card or post it note,
- whether we need to go to Festival, Aldi, the Pig, and/or Woodman's, Menards, Walmart, etc.

By the end of the day, each of us will have accumulated hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions. The overwhelming majority will have been quite routine, we won't have given a second thought to them because they are so much a part of daily living.

But there are crucial moments that define a person, decisions that have a fundamental impact on the future, our lives and the lives of others.

For young people there are educational decisions: drop out, trade school, college. People have to decide whether or not to take a new job and move away to a new community. There are decisions whether or not to marry and who to marry.

Is there not a whole spiritual and relational dimension to spending the rest of your life with someone? There are decisions about aging, and the death of loved ones...and our own dying.

These kinds of decisions are more important than our daily routines, aren't they? But what happens if we make them with a casual approach? Disaster often follows. Dare we decide to take a new job in the same manner in which we pick out our breakfast cereal in the market? "Let's see, I have a coupon for a dollar off if I buy two boxes, but the other brand is on sale..."

I think we can pretty much be of one mind about this: there are decisions...then there are DECISIONS. That's what we have in this morning's gospel text: a critical moment has come to those hanging around the Lord Jesus Christ.

People had just witnessed the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 and then heard Jesus' words that he is the bread of life come down from heaven, that we are to "feed" on Him. In other words, Jesus is claiming that his life and words come from God, they are the fundamental key to how one is to live life.

It is at this moment that a mass defection takes place.

Picture Jesus watching people try to slip away discreetly, hoping they wouldn't be noticed. They were making decisions. Jesus' questions, "Does this offend you?" and later, "Do you also wish to go away?" was directed toward the twelve disciples, those who had been following Jesus.

The questions are phrased in such a manner to lead us to believe that Jesus wondered about the faithfulness of those closest to him...it was a time to decide.

But why do many leave? Was it a doctrinal issue, namely, Jesus had just told them that he was directly related to the living God? Was this too much for many to swallow: Jesus crossed over the line of 1st century "good taste" and religious teaching....they thought he was a crackpot?

Many still struggle with those issues today, whether Jesus was truly God and the relationship between His humanity and His divinity. But the Lord Himself isn't taking on this issue here. There is, I believe, a critical reason why there is this flight from Jesus.

This is a decision that has life changing implications. These people leave because Jesus has made life primarily a relationship with God and not a what's for dinner issue. "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

My father-in-law once blurted out, "All of life is spiritual," and I think he came close to what Jesus was trying to say. It is the power of God that not only gives life but also gives meaning to the material and physical aspects of life...not the other way around. For the Christian, all meaning and purpose in life flows out of who Jesus Christ is. It is not our material goods that give meaning and purpose.

This presented to those ancient hearers and us this morning with a critical life-making decision. How are we going to approach life: spiritually or materially? Is it about who I am, what I have....or *whose* I am, *to whom* do I belong?

These people wanted an instant replay of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 which they had just witnessed. Like us, all too often, we want to be taken care of, we want the spectacular, we our lives to be materially blessed. We most often want comforts, not challenges.

When Jesus said that the "flesh is useless," he did not mean it is to be ignored. Otherwise, why would God have sent His own Son, Jesus, in the flesh, as a physical presence? Why would Jesus have healed and fed people; why would Jesus command us to care for the poor and needy?

What the Lord was getting at was that one needs to decide whether or not life is first of all a spiritual issue or a material, biological, physical issue. Our material goods, our human relationships, are not where life begins.

If the life of a church centers on material things, then all we say and do is no more important than some service organization or country club. Is belonging to a church a civic responsibility, part of being a good citizen, a necessary option in order that baptisms, marriages, and funerals can be obtained? Is church about human friendships, as wonderful as they are, or about Jesus?

Congregations get caught up in this mind set. A number of years back a large, evangelical church in Colorado decided to float a bond issue to finance a beautiful, new building addition that would include senior citizen housing. It was all to be done for the glory of Christ, to broaden their ministry.

But the bond issue quickly became a financial disaster, consuming huge amounts of energy and time; the church ran afoul of civic regulations, regulations intended to keep things honest, they hadn't done their homework...and ultimately, they found themselves unable to pay off the investors. It was an awful witness. The pastor candidly admitted to the press: "We simply lost our focus on whom we were about, that is, Jesus Christ."

The people that left Jesus had lost their focus. Yes, they were poor peasants, but their view of life was confined to simply having bread to eat and having their diseases cured. Jesus, they thought, was present to bring about their comfort, to make everything better right now. Is it any different for us today?

When Jesus launched into a whole discourse on **His being** the bread of life, that people are to feed **on Him** so that they can truly live, the Lord placed the essence of life into realm of a continuous relationship with Jesus.

"It is the spirit that give life," said Jesus. When we recognize that everything rests on the spiritual plane, we are in a proper position to live life as God intended. Every single action and perspective has the dimension of the Lord Jesus involved:

feeding the hungry, caring for the poor,
whether to marry or remain single,
how one deals with sexuality,
how one deals with finding hope and forgiveness....and in giving out hope and forgiveness,
going to work, retirement, raising children, going to school are all touched by this Jesus Christ.

If we see Jesus as a convenience on whom we can call when the need arises, if we see Jesus as merely a resource instead of the source our of which springs life, eternal life, if we see Jesus as a spiritual fast food window....then we are completely missing the point of life, we walking away from Him.

"Do you wish to go away?" Jesus asks those remaining behind.

For Peter and those others, a moment of decision, a decision that continues to have reaching effects on personal lives and the entire world. Life had become a profound spiritual issue. Pete utters that life changing question, "Lord, to whom can we go?"

Where will we go to find life this morning? Where are we going each day? This decision is more than where we'll eat after worship this morning. Will you slip from this place thinking that it makes no difference or that Jesus demands too much? Or will Peter's words tumble off your lips from the depths of your heart?

"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know you are the Holy One of God." I believe with all my heart our lives are about decisions made as we journey...but this decision is about going with the One who has the words of life...eternal life...and I suspect it needs to be made over and over again in this changing and challenging world.

AMEN.