

John 6:52-69

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

"THE INDISPENSABLE CHRIST"

John 6:68

It's said that no one is indispensable. That's true, and it's especially true for preachers. In about a year, you'll be saying, "John Tapscott? Hmmm. I think I remember him..." Nature abhors a vacuum they say, and empty positions soon fill up. A new person comes along with their own gifts and

personality. So no one is indispensable, and no one is irreplaceable, at least not in the long run.

Except for one - Jesus Christ. He is indispensable to the church. "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." He is indispensable to individual Christians. You are simply not a Christian apart from faith in Jesus. He said, "Follow me, not a set of rules or a philosophy or an ideal, follow me." Christian faith is a living, personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus Christ is indispensable to the Christian Church and the Christian life.

John 6. Some of the disciples were finding Jesus' teaching difficult. Many turned back and no longer followed him. And Jesus allowed them to go. Even Jesus couldn't please everyone. That should comfort us when we find we can't please everyone. Then he turned and asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe that you are the holy one of God." Peter was saying, "Lord, there is no one else to whom we can go. You are indispensable."

People are free to leave Jesus' flock, to doubt and to search. They are also free to come back. Now that's not inevitable. But some do, eventually if they're wise. For in their wandering and doubting they discover that there really is no one else to whom they can go. They discover that Jesus Christ meets our hopes and fears as nothing and no one else can. So whenever you are tempted to flee from the church and from faith in the living Christ, honestly ask yourself "To whom can I go?" And I think you will wind up saying with Peter, "Lord there is no one else to whom we can go." Let me speak about three ways in which Jesus Christ is indispensable.

First, He is indispensable because he answers the basic questions of life.

Imagine a tribe of people living by a great river. The water provides fish to eat, water for their crops and a refreshing source of recreation. But they don't know where it comes from or where it's going. They just watch and wonder. Someone has said that's what we are like before the river of life. It seems like a big mystery. Where did I come from? Where am I going? How do I get there? What is the meaning of life? What about God? To whom can we go with these basic questions? Well, really in the end to no one but Jesus, because he is God's answer to these questions. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. He is the Word of life. He is the clue to life's big mysteries.

Where did we come from? Where are we going? The Gospel of John says that Jesus knew he had come from God and was going to God. The answer for us is really the same. God is your creator and mine. We came from God and

our destiny is to return to God. And we get there through faith in his crucified and Risen Son.

Furthermore, the purpose of life on earth, as John puts it, is to be as Jesus is. The purpose of life is not what you get, but who you are, who you are becoming, in other words, character. I believe it was Martin Luther who said that, "Each of us is to become a mini-Christ." Of course, most of us are a long way from Christ, yet we can all think of people who are Christ-like in character. Some people may even think of you. Certainly it is a slow process, but as we put on Christ the fruits of the Spirit grow within us because they were in him. The purpose of life is to grow in character to become like Jesus- generous, self-giving, compassionate, kind, merciful, courageous, seeking justice and righteousness, resisting evil and overcoming evil with good. That's the big purpose of life – to become like Jesus and to allow his life to shine through our own individual personalities.

What about the God question? What is God like? Again there is really no one else to go to for he reveals the truth about God. Scripture says, "he is the image of the invisible God."

Many people know deep inside that God exists, but they don't know God as he really is. They think of God as one who hedges us in, rather than one who gives us true freedom. They think of God as one who is always trying to catch people out and send them to hell. And so they resent God and turn from him. Oh, it bothers me when people say "God sends people to hell." God does not send people to hell. If someone winds up there, it's because they have totally rejected God's grace and mercy, and chosen that destiny themselves. Scripture says that "God desires everyone to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth..." and he sent Jesus into the world for this very purpose. Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save the world. Jesus reveals that at the heart of this universe there is a loving Heavenly Father who cares passionately for everything and everyone he has made, a God who in Christ endured the cross to save us from our sins, a God who is at work for good in this broken world, and will fulfill all his loving purposes, putting away evil at last and making all things new.

To whom will we go with our basic questions? Well, to Jesus. He is indispensable because he answers these questions for us as no one else can.

Secondly, Jesus is indispensable because he is the great burden bearer.

Think of some of the heavy burdens we carry. Though talk about sin and guilt is old-fashioned, deep inside we know better. We know we've fallen short. We know we have offended Holy God. We know we have hurt others through our words and actions. We have hurt ourselves by our own foolishness. We

fear punishment and condemnation. As Paul writes, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want but the very thing I hate." And Paul cries out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Then Paul declares, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." And on the cross he made these words a reality by bearing our burden of sin in his own sinless body. And he sets free all who cast their burden upon him. Paul says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Or take the burden of responsibility. Sometimes the heavy burdens we bear threaten to crush us. And these heavy burdens can add yet another burden – the burden of anxiety. Furthermore, following Christ in this world means taking up a cross, sometimes a costly one. But to all who feel the weight of life's burdens, Jesus says, "Come unto me all you who are weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The Scripture says, "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you." That's also true about the cross we carry for his sake. Should we stumble and fall, his hand lifts us up and puts us on our feet again. His grace is sufficient for us.

And what about the burden of grief and loss which we all experience? Well, Jesus himself was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. And to those with ears to hear he says, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."

"To whom can we go with our burdens of sin, responsibility and grief?" In the end, there is no one else but Jesus. Jesus Christ is indispensable because he is the great burden bearer.

Finally, Jesus is indispensable because he has the words of eternal life.

That's what Peter said. "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

The Bible tells us that God has put eternity into the human heart. It's so hard to believe that life ends with earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

To whom can we turn with our longings for eternity? Well, to Jesus. For the Holy One of God has words of eternal life; indeed, he opened the gates of heaven through his atoning death and resurrection victory. With God's help we put our faith and trust in him. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." He also says, "Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you." There is much more to come on the other side.

I have conducted many funerals during my ministry. And so often, even if the person who passed away was not particularly religious, or even if the family isn't, so often they request hymns like "Amazing Grace" or "The Old Rugged Cross," or "Abide With Me," or a reading like the 23rd Psalm. They instinctively know that there is only one to whom they can turn to at such a time. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

So yes, we are free to go, but so many of us wouldn't dream of doing so. Life is inconceivable without Jesus. For Jesus is "the rock of our salvation." In him we have been born anew to a living hope. "Lord, to whom can we go?" Well, there is no one else to whom we can go. For he has the words of eternal life." Jesus Christ is indispensable.