

TOUGH BREAD

Some passages are soft and nurturing. Some are uplifting and inspiring, and..... Some are hard to swallow.

In today's New Testament passage, Jesus said,  
"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me." .....And, Jesus goes on to say that whoever eats "this bread will live forever."

On the surface, this is very strange stuff..... "Eat my flesh"?  
Drink my blood ? "Eat me" ??????? ..... Sounds rather bizarre.

One of the early reasons the Romans persecuted the growing New Testament church was because they thought that the Christians were a cult of cannibals, .....and this passage does sound a little creepy.

Verse 60 puts it mildly, explaining the reaction of many of his followers when they heard Jesus say this, quoting, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" .....Difficult, to say the least.

It's pretty obvious here, that Jesus wasn't afraid to shock.. or prod and arouse a strong reaction.

This "eating me and drinking my blood" stuff sure is NOT sugar coated or P.C. AND, with the common image of a soft, tender Jesus, we tend to think that he would be quick to try to smooth their ruffled feathers...with gently words for their reaction of "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

At this point people are shuffling to the door and are ready to leave.

*So,.... let's see if Jesus tries to be careful and tone things down.....*

But he doesn't; instead, he stingingly replies,

**"Does this offend you?"**

And then he adds to it a brazen side comment, 'If you can't handle that how will you handle seeing me ascending to where I was before?'

By this time, people's heads were spinning and many are going out the door,... and so Jesus finally, prudently gears down the RPMS

He explains that he was not talking about his own physical flesh and blood, and he was **not** inviting them to use their teeth to take a chunk out of his body.

//// It was a metaphor. He was talking about spiritual things.

Picking up in verse 63,

“It is the spirit that gives **life**; the flesh is useless [for such thing]. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

In other words, if you understand the metaphor you will understand life, including eternal life, and you’ll understand perhaps the Gospel, too?

He adds that all this is not his doing; It is all God’s doing. Jesus is just the example / the demonstrator.

Jesus’ pointed comments were apparently a bit too strong, because in verse 66 we are told that many in the crowd, who were followers of Christ, “turned back” and stopped following Jesus. They left.

This is a common reaction to the rough gristle in Christ’s message.

Yet, this is very troubling? We don’t want to see people leave / break away from the journey with us. We would think that Jesus would have softened the message some, and make it more palatable easier to chew and swallow.

But, he didn’t. Instead of offering nice soft Wonderbread, Jesus presented a heavy German whole wheat bread. ??????

Christ’s message is NOT a “smoothy”, but more like a stiff cup of coffee. Following Christ is not for the masses. It is hard to keep up / to keep pace with Jesus.

As we see in this passage, Jesus was frank, even blunt.

And, I’m not making this up; it’s in the text.

Moreover, if his caustic / acidic words so far, were not enough, he turned to the disciples and said, **“Do you also wish to go away [too]?”**

I dare say the disciples were likely a little puzzled and confused by Jesus’ remarks and the reactions they were seeing.

Peter answered for the group, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life! You have the words of eternal life.

Is that what this is all about –just securing our life after this life? ????

*I don’t believe the “life” Jesus is referring to is merely the after life.*

Kingdom living / living With God.... can begin now!

Even so, some people come to Jesus out of fear – a fear of dying / a fear of “what’s next.”

Some people are curious and discover a deeper wisdom in the way of Christ.

Others desperately need to be loved and accepted, and they find the divine through the love and Grace of Jesus.

Whatever the reason / whatever the twelve’s reasons, that first “hook” / encounter.... is just a beginning.

I don't think the twelve disciples fully understood what was going on, but they did realize who had the wisdom. They were learning.

They knew who to follow / which direction to go.

And, that decision to continue took faith, in light of Jesus bluntly telling them there is much more to the journey.

They were being saved! They were in the process.... They were continuing the journey of being followers of Christ.

Peter added, "We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

They recognized who Jesus was, and were beginning to understand that it was wise to follow him.

Some assessment on this text:

In this passage, Jesus is a tad caustic, acerbic – scathing with his comments.

?Perhaps, there is a time to be soothing and gentle ....and a time to be blunt and provocative.

Maybe the shocking approach is appropriate, in certain situations, to get people turned around, to challenge **the mislead** to discover another way, to get people to dig a little deeper.

Maybe that is why warning signs are in bright colours, and fire truck sirens pierce the ears.

Sometimes a message has to be confrontational and obnoxious

It may seem harsh, but maybe sometimes it is appropriate.

These days, a large part of Christendom praises and applauds Jesus for being the sacrificial lamb, for doing it so we don't have to. They've simplified, codified pureed, tenderized and softened the Gospel into an individualistic, right and wrong message happy theology that will get you a ticket to heaven,..... thanks to Jesus.

I wonder how they define "following Christ"?

I wonder how they swallow today's text that points out that following Jesus means abiding in, taking in, being as Jesus – all of Jesus, and not just praising / the victories and the highlights.

Taking in Jesus includes the sugar that life offers .....and the salt and vinegar, too.

Sometimes Jesus was very gentle, but other times Jesus intentionally provoked people. Following Christ may include both approaches.

You are likely aware of the ongoing debate that is going on in the States about changing their health care system....by providing a public insurance option. The "debate" is getting a little nasty, because the for profit insurance industry's advertizing is spreading a lot of fear with their misinformation. This is all very interesting, and.... sad.... because...80% of Americans want to improve the system. They want decent healthcare – a system that won't make them bankrupt if they become very ill. In addition, 40 million American do not have any insurance at all–meaning their only healthcare is going to the hospital emergency room.

President Obama's plan intends to make insurance available to everyone. Even so, 40 some percent support the suggested changes, and nearly 40% are against them.

Needless to say, I have many friends in the States, and one is a self proclaimed Libertarian, and a Texan. *I have no idea how he graduated from seminary, and retained his Texan ideology? He must have worked hard at it.*

Anyways, we got into a discussion about healthcare systems.

In the beginning of our conversation, I chose the gentle Jesus approach. I tried to appeal to reason and a sense of empathy.

I stated how I thought our Canadian system of universal healthcare was much better ....and that it was **just**—everyone had access. I told of my observations and experiences here, and then I shared how I witnessed countless ugly and terrible situations in the States. I mentioned the example of Wayne who was knowingly allowed to die in the hospital because he didn't have insurance to cover the cost of the surgery he needed.

I noted the logic of how as a society / a nation we can do so much more when we pool our resources together to solve big problems, such as healthcare. *I tried to be low key and gentle.*

However,..... He shot back with: "Well, the poor people need to get better jobs. I work hard and pay for my healthcare.

I'm not going to pay for someone who won't work. Plus, if I have the money, then why should I have to wait for a procedure?

Moreover, I don't trust the government. I'm against BIG government. Government bureaucracy is wasteful.

I decided a tougher / more direct approach was appropriate, at this time.

I countered: if you don't trust the government, then why do you support the military? You Libertarians should be working hard to disband the military, but the truth is.... you love the government if it is serving your own personal interests.

Also, ....sure there is waste in the government bureaucracy, ... just as there is waste in the private sector.... Should I mentioned General Motors or any of the Wall street companies?

In fact, if I examined your books, I bet I'd find waste, too.

Trust and efficiency is NOT your real concern.

The truth is David, your selfish and greedy. You only want to share your leftovers and NOT your life. I don't know how you can claim to be a follower of Christ, and not share your life.

*I may have been too harsh..... I don't know. I will add, that we are friends.... and our friendship has survived, so far.....* In this case, I hope the message with bright colours and blazing siren was appropriate.

Following Christ is NOT easy.

In the very presence of Jesus, many chose to quit and leave. Today, we don't have the flesh and blood Jesus inviting us to follow, but we do have the flesh and blood in the scriptures to chew on and God's Spirit prodding us onward. Even so, is Tough to journey follow.

It is a difficult challenge for we are called to consume / assimilate, to be as Jesus: to be love and grace,..... and... to proclaim Justice; to comfort and nurture as a shepherd,.... AND.... to confront leaders and the powerful; to be tender and gentle.... AND... bold and provocative,.... and ..... AND.... to give our lives up in the journey.....

I think we have the same question stuck in our throat as those in the crowd had, which is: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

The demands which Jesus puts on us seem so unfair at times, and yes, in many ways these demands, these questions, these statements that Jesus makes do offend, ...in great part because of the dilemmas we disciples are placed in by such demands,....such as loving our enemies...as we confront injustice.

In some ways, I have it 'easy' as a church pastor.

I am expected to struggle with such dilemmas. I have the time, the training and the title.

But, what about the school teacher who has a child in her class whose parents have put him out on the streets because they can no longer control him?

What about the good family man working as an accountant for Cameco, or the police officer walking / driving the dangerous streets each day?

How do those folks resolve the dilemma of being a disciple who accepts difficult teachings and seeks to live them out in her or his life?

IT IS TOUGH,....very tough.

In different words:

the church spends so much time talking about how our failures and wrong deeds break God's heart. Church people are constantly urged to say 'no' to things – No to conflicts, no to drugs, no to lust, greed, gluttony, etc.

But, I am no longer convinced that it is our inability to say 'no' that breaks God's heart, but rather it is our inability to say 'yes' to God in Christ Jesus:

- yes to the difficult teachings,
- yes to the demanding life,
- Yes to doing justice and standing up for Justice and equality.
- Yes to ONE kingdom living, which includes the environment and politics.
- yes to true discipleship, and YES... to being and doing love and grace.

We know what saying '**no**' looks like; Goodness sake we have enough people describing NO for us.

But, maybe we are just not sure what '**yes**' looks like, because there are not enough people modelling it for us.

Maybe we are missing out on the full life... the Life of YES.

Perhaps, we don't know how it feels to have our hearts on fire for God?

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This new awareness / this spiritual birth / this call to be as Jesus is very challenging, very tough indeed.

I don't think the disciples had all the answers, but at least, they saw the wisdom, the beauty and holiness of following Jesus,... and they chose to continue their journey with him. Maybe, this "tough bread" is worth chewing on for a while, and maybe chewing on it is part of discovering God's kingdom here on earth.

Maybe rebirth takes time. Maybe salvation is a journey. Maybe hope is in the Yes

Maybe love grows? ???????????????