

John 6:66-68 *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67“**You do not want to leave too, do you?**” Jesus asked the Twelve. 68Simon Peter answered him, “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**”*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

This past weekend, I saw a post on Facebook that went something like this: “Could stores just put up a sign in their windows stating if they do or don’t have toilet paper? That way you could know if it was worth stopping or if it was better to keep on going.” Do you know the feeling? I’m not a guy who likes to spend time just wandering around a store looking. I like to go in, get what I want and get out! Especially when you are looking for one specific thing, it’s a complete waste of a time to go into a store and look around until you find they don’t have what you want. Why go into a store when they don’t have what you need?

Why do you follow this warrior, Jesus? Why spend time each Wednesday listening to the story of his battle and following his path of suffering toward his victory at the end? Why are you willing to spend time listening to him as he speaks to you in his word? Why do you give up pleasures and desires that others around you enjoy to live as the people God wants you to be? Why go through the hassle of fighting alongside of him and enduring suffering and hardship as he did? What are you looking for? What does he offer to you? Perhaps the better way to ask the question is this: What does Jesus have that you need? What does he have to offer to you that doesn’t make it a waste of your time to worship him, listen to him, follow him, and suffer with him?

Perhaps no one could say it more succinctly than Peter did when Jesus essentially asked these same questions of his disciples and Peter answered: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*” It doesn’t get much more simple or clear than this. Why would we go to anyone else? Why would we follow anyone but Jesus? Jesus has the words that bring eternal life to his people. To us, this is clear and obvious. It really is that simple. There is no one else that can offer to us what we need most: eternal life. While the comfort and peace Jesus bring to us during our earthly trials knowing that he is in control and watching over us is great, it pales in comparison to the eternal life he brings. While following the rules and commandments of Jesus does make life better for us and help us to avoid problems, they pale in comparison to the eternal life he brings. Anything that Jesus or anyone else can offer for our earthly life might be well and good, but it can’t help us overcome death. No matter how comforted we are, what kind of peace we have in trouble, what trouble we avoid by living well, that doesn’t help us with death. Only Jesus who has conquered and defeated death and promised life to those who believe in him can do anything about death.

So many people miss that. They understand the need they have for toilet paper and hand sanitizer and to stock up on food when you are facing a possible quarantine. They rush to the stores in hoards to grab as much as possible. Even though the warnings are out there to keep your distance from people and stay at home, the stores are full of people grabbing what they need. Why were they so quick to abandon the church? Why don’t we see the same rush for Jesus? On the first day when we are able to open our worship back up to the public, why won’t we see people lining up outside the church and around the building to find a seat the way they did at Sam’s and Costco and others? The simple answer is: they don’t see the need they have for Jesus.

Of course, neither did all of the people at the time of Jesus either. This account before us today took place in the last year of Jesus’ ministry. The crowds had followed him for two years, watching him and listening to what he had to say. It was a crowd of 5,000 men not including women and children that Jesus had just fed with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. The people wanted to make Jesus their bread king. They even considered taking him by force to keep him in that region so that they could get all the free food they needed and be healed of any disease they contracted. The only needs they saw were physical needs and they saw that Jesus could fill that need. They had lost sight of the beautiful promises of a Savior who would rescue them from sin and give them eternal life. They had turned God’s beautiful promises into a prediction of a king who would throw out the hated Romans and establish a kingdom on earth with unlimited bread and health. They had no need for a spiritual Savior since they were God’s people and believed that as the chosen people God would automatically take them to be with him in heaven.

When Jesus rejected their efforts to make him their bread king and tried to teach them about how he came from heaven to give them “bread” which would cause them to live forever, this was too much. Many walked away. Even many of Jesus’ disciples—not the 12 but others who were close to him—turned back and no longer followed him. They didn’t care that he was the Savior who had come to offer his perfect life in exchange for the world’s sin on Calvary. As Jesus was preparing his troops for the war ahead, some just walked away. The enemy of Jesus had gotten to their hearts. He led them to believe the lie that Jesus couldn’t be who he had said and showed himself to be. They chose rather to believe a false doctrine of the worst kind—that they could get to heaven by being good people and following the law. The battle was striking close to home for Jesus. It wasn’t just the “the people out there” or “those in the world” who were rejecting him. These were people whom he had come to know personally, who

followed him for 2 years, who walked all of those miles with him, slept on the ground many nights with him, had eaten and drank with him. They just turned their backs on him and left him, disappointed that he didn't do what they wanted and sad because they thought he didn't have the power to do what he said.

Jesus' enemy, the devil, is still fighting hard against him today causing people to turn away from him. He has encouraged lost people to grow deeper in their separation from God by establishing numerous false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, atheism, materialism, and many more—all of whom offer some sort of path to God or substitute for God, a path that leads only to hell. He has made inroads into the Christian church, spreading false doctrine, attacking the Bible and using critics of Christianity in the media, in universities, in politics to damage and destroy saving faith. We see this come to fruition in the growing number of "dones", those people who have left the church for whatever reason and won't come back. We see this in the escalating group of people who consider themselves to be "nones", people who want no religious affiliation. They claim to be spiritual but not religious, finding their certainty in how they feel and in doing whatever they want.

Even here in our own church, we have some members who once enthusiastically promised right here in front of this church that they would remain faithful to Jesus and his Word, even if they had to die for it. Yet they allowed something to take away their joy of being in God's house and hearing his word and worship him. Jesus asks a very pointed question of each of us today: "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

It's essential that we ponder this question. It's not beneficial to follow Jesus just because that's what you've always done or that's what is expected of you or because you nebulously believe "it's the right thing to do." It's good to ask: why do you follow Jesus? What does he offer to you that leads you to devote time, energy and resources to worship him and follow him and to listen to him? Listen to Peter and he gives you the best reason why: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" This is the power of God's word. It alone has the power to bring you eternal life. The Bible is so important, gathering for worship is so important, engaging in regular Bible study is so important because through these means we study God's word which has the power to bring eternal life. That word is where we find how Jesus won the battle against the devil's temptations and rescued us eternally. That word is the means through which the Holy Spirit works saving faith in our heart. That word alone has the power to awaken our hearts from spiritual death and bring them to spiritual life where we know, trust in believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has purchased and won for us forgiveness for all of our sins. That word is what gives us forgiveness for our past, peace in the present chaos of our world and hope for the future in the mansion of heaven that is waiting for us.

All of this is ours through the word of God found in the Bible. This is where we find the strength to stand firm in God's word through the spiritual battles the devil brings before our eyes. How important that we keep our eyes focused on the eternal life God has waiting for us in Jesus and cling tightly to his promises through the challenges we face until heaven becomes reality for us. Jesus has all that you need for this life, but especially for the life to come. This is where our focus needs to be at all times. Let me ask you, what are you doing with all the spare time on your hands with so many activities being shut down around us? I know there is a lot of household cleaning getting done that should have been done long ago but wasn't. I had to stop at Home Depot on Sunday and found the store packed, so I'm guessing a lot of home projects are getting done. But where does spending time reading God's word fall into your new normal? We can't worship together as we have before. Our Bible study isn't the same as it was. Yet your schedule has been cleared so that you can spend more time reading God's word, being strengthened in his love, and finding the peace that is yours in God alone.

A WELS pastor this week wrote on Facebook: In three short months, just like He did with the plagues of Egypt, God has taken away everything we worship. God said, "you want to worship athletes, I will shut down the stadiums. You want to worship musicians, I will shut down Civic Centers. You want to worship actors, I will shut down theaters. You want to worship money, I will shut down the economy and collapse the stock market. You don't want to go to church and worship Me, I will make it where you can't go to church". "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Maybe we don't need a vaccine. Maybe we need to take this time of isolation from the distractions of the world and have a personal revival where we focus on the ONLY thing in the world that really matters. Jesus."

Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. I pray that we use this extra time which God has given to us to draw closer to him through his Word. Use this time to turn back to the Lord. No, we don't want to leave Jesus, especially at this time. He alone has the words of eternal life. In the end, that's all that we need—and they will never go out of stock. Amen.