

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 12
Saturday, August 14, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 15, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“The Gospel is Scandalous”

John 6:51-69

When I learned that I had to be quarantined after returning home from Indianapolis, I gathered some books from my library and spent the week taking a deep dive into John 6. I found some brilliant words from some brilliant men which I will be sharing especially in our Wednesday Bible classes certainly when we get to the Sacrament of the Altar. Be prepared to hear a lot about John chapter 6 in the months to come.

Today I want to focus in on Jesus’ question to the grumbling crowd: “Do you take offense at this?” The actual Greek word is “skandalidzei” – from which we get the word “scandalous”. The root of scandal or scandalous actually refers to something that would cause you to stumble or fall. If you are caught in a scandal, you will fall from grace. In the OT and NT, the image of the stumbling block leading to faithlessness is common.

These disciples of Jesus who have “taken offense” at His words concerning His flesh being true food and His blood being true drink are not demonstrating ignorance. They are demonstrating unbelief. Jesus goes on to say, “There are some of you who do not believe.”

Much like the world today, there has always been those who refuse to believe until their reason can understand or they can, figuratively speaking, put their fingers into the nail marks in Christ's hand or put their hand into His side. Our Old Adam has been totally corrupt since the Fall. The scandalous nature of our world stumbling into darkness and unbelief is nothing new.

We look to the flesh and blood of Christ and there is no reason or rationale that tells you it is anything more than bread and wine. It is "scandalous"; it is a stumbling block for those who do not believe. The sacrament is scandalous. The cross is scandalous. The Gospel is scandalous. Think about what we believe, teach, and confess to be the truth.

There are many who assume that it is easy to believe. You just say you believe these words and then merrily go your way. No, on the contrary, truly believing the Gospel and having faith in salvation won through the cross of Jesus requires you to fight against and distrust what your rational mind and the world tells you or shows you every day.

How can my rational mind, my reason, reconcile the reality that even though I have sinned and continue to sin daily, that I should go unpunished and expect to go unpunished having been rendered completely free of any guilt while the only person to ever walk the earth in innocence suffers a scandalous death on a cross.

That is in defiance of all the laws of the world. No society would last if it was agreed upon that say, each year, the most innocent, virtuous person would be killed and that would cover the guilt of all the crimes of everyone else.

Everyone else gets off scot-free. The one person is our scapegoat. Think of what society would look like if that was our practice.

But then we are told that instead of any person dying, two regular goats will be provided instead – at no cost to any of you. And this will continue until the promised perfect person comes along, then his death would cover the guilt of everyone for all time and you don't need to sacrifice goats anymore. That sounds like a movie plot which would be immediately rejected.

But after God rescued His people from Egypt, each year, God took the sins of the people off of them and onto the Ark of the Covenant, essentially onto Himself, and those sins were atoned for through the sacrifice of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. No cost to any of the people of Israel. Atonement covered them even if they were not present at the ceremony.

Our reason, our rational mind will always treat the holy things of God as being scandalous, a stumbling block. For the Jews, even many of His disciples, eating His flesh was scandalous. Drinking His blood was beyond scandalous. It went directly against what that they had been taught under the Old Covenant. A child of Abraham was never to consume blood. You could not order a rare steak in Israel. The thought of drinking blood was scandalous.

In Lev. 17, the Israelites are told by God Himself, "I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. ¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." That is what God said through Moses.

Jesus comes to them and says, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” Is Jesus contradicting the Word of God? By no means! In establishing this truth, He demonstrates Himself to be the fulfillment of Scripture. We are told that there would come a prophet greater than Moses and that there would be a new covenant which would not be like the old covenant.

The new covenant would be a covenant full of grace with God promising to “remember our sin no more.” Sin cannot be forgiven without a sacrifice. Blood must be shed. Life must be lost. Life is in the blood.

In the OT, it was scandalous to drink any blood. Under Christ’s new covenant in His blood “given and shed for you for the remission of sins” it is scandalous, a stumbling block, to not partake of the blood which He offers.

The first part of the disciples’ response is accurate: “This is a hard saying.” It is the rest of their response which caused them to stumble. The flesh and blood of Christ are truly present wherever the Word is joined with the bread and wine. The true food and true drink are only recognized by the eyes of faith and this meal come with a glorious promise.

“Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Sadly, many of His disciples still turned away and no longer followed Him.

Even though we are called to believe, teach, and confess many things which are hard, some even impossible, to understand, we join with Peter who knows there is no where else to go, and we say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Amen.