

"It Is Difficult to Keep On Keeping On." – November 6, 2016
by Wayne J. Schneider – Credo en Unam Sanctum

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St. John 6:53-60

Last Sunday I spoke on the "Other Jesus" and "Hard Sayings," that produced this inquiry from Jesus' disciples: "*This is a hard saying; who can understand it?*" Before we look at this again let's visit the 'back story.'

The miracle feeding of the five thousand had just happened. Jesus' disciples, being members of the "self-centered," I want-what-I-what-and-I-want-it-now! generation, were astounded. They, like many Christians today, were drawn in part to Jesus simply because of what he might do to meet their superficial needs.

As these enthusiastic crowds followed Jesus around the Sea of Galilee, he confronted them with their simple expectations. He shared his deep desire to satisfy their spiritual hunger and thirst, and courageously declared he was the Bread of Life. Everyone who believed in him would never again be hungry or thirsty.

Dumbfounded by this promise, they were staggered by his claim to have come from heaven: "*Isn't this the carpenter's son? How can he claim to be from above?*" Is it any wonder that the Jews argued about what Jesus meant? Their previous praise turned to animosity.

I am grateful the Jews expressed their contempt. It generated one of the most helpful of Jesus' hard sayings. Look again at today's gospel lesson: "*Jesus said to them, I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Human One and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*" Jesus said these things while he was

teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Many of his disciples who heard this said, '*This message is harsh. Who can hear it?*'"

If the crowds were STUNNED before they were SPEECHLESS now! I like how the New English translation portrays the crowd's reaction: "*This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such words?*" These words might be revolting, perhaps nauseating, until we understand the inner meaning of the earthy Aramaic idiom.

In Jesus' day people worked ALL day, to the point of exhaustion. A common saying at the end of a work day was, "*I have eaten my body and drunk my blood.*" Meaning I have given it everything I have. The statement was a colorful metaphor for absolute allegiance.

Before we say Jesus was a tad crude, recall our slang: "sweating blood;" or Churchill's "Blood, sweat, and tears." Or our jargon, "Bloodsuckers;" and "Eat your heart out!" We never expect to be taken literally. What may have initially been seen as a suggestion of cannibalism, is a call to commitment, to profound communion, and an introduction to breathtaking responsibility. I think the disciples objected to this hard saying not because they did not understand it, but because they did.

I think many of us struggle to keep struggling. We are so acclimatized to struggling that we even struggle with Jesus who is the answer to our struggles.

A recent Pew research study found that many Christians have become habitual strugglers: we struggle with life's issues, funky people, and challenges. We want Jesus' power but not his solution.

The primary struggle is, of course, who will run our lives. There is little difficulty in accepting the values of Jesus and Jesus as our Savior. Our problem is with the uncompromising call to his Lordship in our life. Committing to this is the secret to our problems and our lives. Without this commitment we live in spiritual poverty.

Looking at this hard saying, we discover that it is an earth-shattering assurance. Jesus is not calling us to just imitate his example; rather, he is inviting us to assimilate

him, his spirit, his life. When we eat and when we drink together, we absorb his life, his teaching, his character, his ways, his virtues, his wisdom.

It is one thing to say, "*I am imitating Jesus*" or, "*Asking myself What Would Jesus Do,*" and then attempt this in my power and to do it my way. It is quite another thing to honestly surrender your life to the Lordship of Jesus. Perhaps the real reason so many of us hesitate to give ourselves over to Jesus, is the fear of losing control, and the anxiety of what the Holy Spirit might wish to in and thru us?

Instead of Jesus being "The Eternal Threatener," Jesus is The Ultimate Participant--in everything---both the good and the painful. St. Paul instructs us that there is nothing but Jesus and that He IS everything and is IN everything. When Jesus is fully revealed, when He is in your life, you will be revealed in all your glory with Him. (Colossians 3:4).

I love what one pastor* wrote during the "Jesus Movement" in the 1960's: "*This renewal has four essential qualities, and they become an inventory for all of us. (1) The people who are taking Jesus seriously have made a new commitment to live for Christ as the dynamic center of their lives. (2) They have invited the Holy Spirit to live in them. (3) They feed on him in a consistent daily study of the Scriptures. The Hard sayings have become their training manual for obedient discipleship. (4). And within them, the indwelling Lord is leading them into faithfulness in communicating his grace and serving him in costly service.*"

May it be so for each of us. Alleluia. Amen.

*=Lloyd John Olgelvie