

Title: “At the Side of the Pool”

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John 6:51-69

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Our own sinful nature prohibits us from always trusting that Jesus is our savior: our message and our messenger. At times we turn inwards, trusting in our own selves and our own messages and the messages of the world. Peter reminds us that “Jesus has the words of eternal life” and we receive him at the altar where he offers us forgiveness of sins and reassurance of his promises. He is not just the messenger but the message as well. He is the truth, the way, and the life. Eternal salvation comes only through him.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

A young child stood at the edge of the pool. He had stood in this same spot many times over the course of many summers, but today was different. Today, the floaties that normally surrounded his arms, those floaties that he always placed his trust in, were no longer there. He had outgrown them, or at least that’s what his parents had told him, and from this moment forward he would have to find something new in which to place his trust.

“Jump.” He heard those words and in times past they brought excitement, today they brought anxiety. “Jump! I’ll catch you,” he heard again. He looked around. Although he was only six, he was old enough to know that he found safety in where he stood. The water couldn’t pull him under, couldn’t fill his mouth and sting his eyes if he remained safely on solid ground. The trust he had once placed in his floaties now searched for a new object to be attached to, and right now the dry ledge of the pool seemed like a perfectly acceptable place. “Jump! I promise I’ll catch you.” He turned towards the voice. It was there at his feet, already in the pool. There stood his father, looking up with arms opened wide, his smile reassuring, and his eyes begging this young child for his trust. His father was pleading with him to place his trust not in the solid ground but to locate it in him. His father was asking him to trust both the messenger as well as the message. “Jump!”

Trust in both the message as well as the messenger is the focus of our gospel passage today. Listen again to what he tells all who are following him:

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Jesus is calling them to trust in him: both the messenger as well as the message. He is unfolding to them a truth that is difficult to comprehend but one that will save their eternal lives.

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For

my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus is not simply asking them to trust the messenger and the message independently. He’s not suggesting to them that he is a prophet, sent by God to give Israel a message. That, they would be able to more easily understand. But what Jesus is proclaiming is this: he is both the messenger *and* the message. He is both the one who brings the life saving good news *and is* the life saving good news. He’s telling them that they cannot pick to trust the message but not the messenger or to trust the messenger but not the message. He’s telling them that they both are one, inseparable, and sent from God. He is telling them that his flesh and his blood are true food and the source of eternal life. All this is just too much for many of them and unwilling to accept it, they turned their back on him, instead.

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

You see, they saw themselves like the little boy at the side of the pool. They found safety in where they stood. They found safety in what they could comprehend and understand. They saw no need to jump into this pool where Jesus stood with arms outstretched. They simply could see no advantage, nothing better position than where they were – on the solid ground of self. And so they turned and walked away. They rejected the messenger as well as the message. But not Peter and the other close disciples.

⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter rightly believed differently than those that walked away. He didn’t find safety on the side of the pool. Indeed, he didn’t even believe that he was *on the side* of the pool. He rightly understood his reality, and the reality of all mankind: he was not standing firmly on solid ground. *He was in the pool already, and he was currently drowning.* He knew that he was already in the water, without floaties and unable to swim. He knew that there was no ledge to swim to and no hope of salvation through any of his actions. The flesh would be no help at all. And where others placed their trust in themselves, thinking that somehow they could swim far enough or float long enough and find safety, Peter and the others knew that this was simply not possible. There was nothing they could do to change their fate. They knew that the only hope they had for life, the only path to salvation was through Jesus. And so, they placed their trust in him, instead. Now at this time, they might have described their situation as being in the pool and drowning. And they might have thought that salvation would require them to call out to Jesus to save them. But they would come to understand that through the death and resurrection of Christ, Jesus had already jumped into the pool at his birth and had already grabbed hold of them. They would come to understand that they had already been rescued and even though they found themselves in this pool of creation, surrounded by water polluted by sin they had already found safety in the arms of Jesus.

We too find ourselves in the same pool as Peter and the rest of creation. We know that we are *not* on solid ground, that the choice to jump or not was made in the first garden, and that we are currently drowning. We know that we are unable to save ourselves. And it is this knowledge that allows us to place our trust in Jesus and his promise of salvation. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” Jesus saves. We do not. What comfort this knowledge brings. And we find this comfort in the arms of Jesus. We find this comfort at his table.

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

You see, this is where we find our safety. This is where we meet Jesus and where we find strength. It is here, when we eat his body and drink his blood that we are reminded that we have already been saved. It is here that we are reminded that we are not drowning but are being held firmly in the arms of Christ.

And this allows us to state with the same certainty of Peter:

You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You meet us at your table where you remind us that you have saved us. We eat and drink your body and blood knowing that in it you forgive our sins and grant us life eternal. We need this reminder constantly and are thankful that you offer it to us, your people.

Amen.