

Bible study on John 6.56-69

Begin with an opening prayer

Welcoming God,
we come to you with open hearts and with open hands.
We come with our faith and hope, and with our doubts and fears.
Send your Holy Spirit to work among us,
filling us and changing us to become more like Jesus.
Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

After a brief reminder of what we heard last week, John reveals that Jesus is speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum. When did Jesus and his entourage get from the lake and into the synagogue? Was the conversation happening on the way from the shore to the building? Or was it in the synagogue on a sabbath? Was it happening as yet more eating was taking place? (Synagogue gatherings usually involved a meal followed by a structured conversation.)

All this leads up to the response of the people, including the disciples (still at this stage a loose band of people, from the very committed to the hangers-on). And, generally, the response is pretty negative – this is too hard, they say (echoing the complaints of the people in the wilderness after the Exodus). They were pleased to get fed but they can't stomach this teaching. And Jesus doesn't answer the complaint; rather he compounds it with words about the Son of Man returning whence he came, and implying that even if these people saw that happen, they wouldn't find the teaching acceptable.

Then he explains why (well, sort of). He draws a contrast between spirit and flesh, suggesting that the teaching is of the spirit and those of the flesh cannot receive it. It is

similar language to that he used with Nicodemus in chapter 3, although the word he uses for flesh is the same as the one he used for his flesh earlier (and that will not have helped to clarify his point). The contrast here is between what human nature can conceive and what the spirit brings about (as Paul urges us to pray in the spirit as that might help us to see things from God's perspective). Jesus says that he has spoken words of spirit and life, but he knows that some, perhaps most, won't get it – hence verse 65 repeating verse 44.

And as if to prove his point, at that moment, many of his disciples left him. Jesus asks the 12 if they want to go too, and we get Peter's great confession (v.68). Perhaps this is the point of the whole section: it is Jesus sifting the wheat from the chaff, getting to grips with the group that he will have to work with for the next couple of years, and trying to ensure that they have some inkling of what they are signing up for.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The dialogue between Jesus and the crowd has moved from the wilderness to the streets on the other side of the lake, and now to the synagogue in Capernaum. Where do people learn about the faith – is it always 'in church'? What is and is not appropriate conversation for church? This growing disagreement about Jesus' flesh is now playing out on the floor of the synagogue. Are we comfortable about opening up similar conversations in our worship services, e.g. conversations about difficult doctrines, complex moral issues, social and political issues that divide us in church as much as in the community?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- When have you ever experienced following a path not knowing where it leads?
- How does it feel to follow Jesus without having all the answers?
- What answers might you give to someone who is not sure about Jesus' way forward?

Prayer

A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, Lord, for your unfailing love.

Thank you that even with all our doubts and fears and worries about the journey ahead, you are there by our side.

Where else can we turn? To whom shall we go?

Thank you that you are our rock and our salvation, our strength and our high tower.

Thank you that as we choose to go on this journey with you, as we make decisions and plans, you are there, gently leading and guiding, always present.

Praise you, Lord, for your constant love and faithfulness.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord Jesus Christ, to whom shall we go?

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

Go with us into your world.

Amen.