

The Best Offense
[John 6:56-69](#)
Rev. Allen M. Thompson
First Presbyterian Church of Danville, VA
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For the past few weeks, we have been going through this one chapter of the Bible, John 6, and we have listened to some things that Jesus has been saying that were very unusual and unexpected to those who were listening to him. Shortly before this, Jesus had miraculously fed thousands of people with only a few fish and a few loaves of bread; but when people came and tried to find him the next day, Jesus said, “you’re not following me because you’re interested in what I’m telling you; you’re following me because you think I have food.”

People were taken aback by this, but instead of trying to explain himself and appeal to them, Jesus just reiterated what he was saying. He went on to say, “I have come down from the Father,” and people were taken aback by that and started grumbling. But instead of trying to appease them, he reiterated his message and went on to say, “many of you have seen me, yet you still do not believe.” With this, people were even more upset, but Jesus again reiterated that he is the bread of life who has come down from Heaven, and in order to receive what God has given, people must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Well, for most people who were still with him, this was too much to take. They were following him because he had given some interesting teaching and he had fed thousands of people. But then he said something that was tough to figure out, and then he said something else that was tough to figure out, and then he said something else that was just really weird.

When he said something that was really weird—that the people needed to drink his blood and eat his flesh—even those who were closest to him said, “whaaaat?.” Actually, they said, “This is a hard saying. Who can accept it?”

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If you’ve been coming to FPC Danville for a while, you probably know that I just start salivating over this kind of thing. For one thing, I like to study the difficult things that Jesus says because, let’s be honest, the world is a difficult place.

For another, I love to think about the ways that we are like Jesus’s disciples. So, when Jesus’s disciples say, “this is a hard saying. Who can accept it?” it cuts right to the heart of all the times that we might have questions about the things that Jesus says and does, even if they don’t make complete sense...or even if they *do* make complete sense, but they aren’t what we want to hear.

But in this moment, we find out why Jesus did not take time to make the things that he was saying easier for his listeners to receive. We discover here that they actually understood what he was saying, but they didn't want to accept it, even though what he was saying was good news.

This language about Jesus coming from the Father also appears in the first chapter of the book of John, and here is what it says in John 1, verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus came from the Father full of grace and truth. Well, throughout this chapter, John 6, that we have been studying, Jesus is delivering both grace and truth; but it seems like whenever he delivers a bit of truth, a bunch of people get upset, and whenever he delivers a bit of grace, only a few people recognize what he's saying. Even when he delivers them together, people still get offended.

Sometimes we are offended by God's truth, but sometimes we are offended by his grace. It's probably pretty easy to think of examples of times when we are offended by God's truth, like when we realize that we have done something wrong, or we have sinned against God and against someone else, but we don't want to admit it. In fact, that kind of feeling is at the heart of this passage. The people don't say, "this is a hard saying; who can understand it?" They say, "this is a hard saying, who can accept it?" They know it's the truth, somehow or some way, but they are hesitant to accept it.

We can also be offended by God's truth when we find something in Scripture that we don't want to believe, so we try to rationalize our way around it ("that doesn't apply today," or "Jesus wouldn't have said that"). Or, maybe we do believe what God calls us to do, but we just can't get around to doing it, like caring for others or giving of our time, talents, and treasures so that God's work can be done.

So, we are all pretty familiar with the times when we are offended by God's truth. But, there are also times that we are offended by God's grace. It's only really implied here in John 6, but we know from many other places in the New Testament that the religious people of Jesus's day had a tough time accepting that God was reaching out not only to them, but also to people that they considered unclean and unworthy—people who hadn't always followed the rules or who weren't from the right place (yet who had been convicted by God's truth).

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue in the city of Capernaum, and he certainly knew that what he was saying would be difficult for the people to accept. Their understanding of God's favor was based on performing rituals and being part of a certain class of people, but if God had sent someone—that is, Jesus—to them, then their responsibility wasn't to

perform their rituals and rest easy in their status, but to follow and listen to the one whom God had sent—the one who was God himself.

That is very difficult to accept, because it meant that in order to grow and to be in relationship with God, they actually had to set aside things that kept them comfortable and assured. They had to take the risk of following someone else and relying on him. Plus, they had to accept that they didn't have everything figured out themselves.

So the people in this passage weren't only offended by God's truth; they were also offended by His grace. Of course, there are many other ways that we can be offended by God's grace, as well. We could be envious of what others have. We could feel entitled to things that we don't have. We could be resentful that God hasn't made things go the way we want them to go...in other words, we can be resentful of God's will.

And that's a funny thing to be, resentful of God's will. It basically means we're saying that things would have been better if we'd gotten our way. Well, how do we know?

Amidst all of the things that Jesus is saying, he is also saying, "those who come to me only come to me by the Father's will." Some people heard that as difficult news because they didn't want everything to be up to God, but it was supposed to be good news because it meant that everything is up to God! The problem with that is that we have to have faith that God is at work, and we have to trust in his love.

I hope that you have been following this amazing story about the three Americans and the British guy who overtook the Islamist terrorist on a French train this past week. One of the most interesting things I heard related to the story was an interview with the father of the American civilian. He spoke from the point of view of a father who had allowed his son to go on a trip on the other side of the world, and he said this:

"I believe that things happen. We live in a fallen world. We live in a world that is full of good *and* evil, and I don't know that there *is* a safe place to shelter your children from evil, so you do your best to teach them how to navigate through and to manage and trust God; and where you can't be, you trust God for it."

We have to trust God, but that's tough to do. The problem with *not* trusting God, though, is that if we aren't trusting Him, then we're turning away from Him. That is what is happening with the people in this story who don't follow Jesus. They had trouble accepting what he was saying, but they probably also didn't recognize what they were doing by turning away. After all, God had sent lots and lots of prophets to them in the past, so what's the rush?

So, most of the people who were following Jesus left him, and it even got to the point that his closest disciples were also wondering who could accept what he was saying. Jesus

heard it, and for the first time in this extended speech, he breaks from his sermon to help people understand what he is saying. Even then, most people leave, but Jesus turns to the 12 who had been following him most closely and asks, “are you going to leave, too?” But Peter replies to him, “Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Even though what Jesus was saying was offensive and hard to accept, there were those very few who did not consider being offended a reason to depart from him, but instead understood it as an invitation to draw closer. After all, unless we ourselves are God, then at some point we are going to be offended by God, because He’s always right and we’re sometimes wrong. We have to understand that, and we have to understand that the times when we have trouble accepting something God has said or done are the very times that He is inviting us to draw closer and keep following.

There is a famous comedian whom I won’t mention because his stuff isn’t always G-rated, but he has a great bit about being offended. This is what he says:

“Offending people is a necessary and healthy act. Every time you say something that’s offensive to another person, you just caused a discussion. You just forced them to have to think.”

Now, that is not always a good idea. We shouldn’t just go around offending people for the sake of it. Jesus offended people, but Jesus is full of grace and truth. We aren’t full of grace and truth. So, we shouldn’t offend people just for the sake of it.

But, the point is still worth considering. If we are offended, then there is a conversation, a discussion to be had. That might not always be the case with other people, but it is the case with God. If we are offended by God, then it means that there is something that we need to understand. God’s offense is the best offense, because it is really an invitation to draw closer to Him. Jesus is saying that it is by the Father’s will that people are able to put aside their offenses and still gather to Jesus.

That is exactly what the disciples did, and they were willing to admit that there would be things that they didn’t understand, but that they had to go along with in following Jesus. Even if it meant that they wouldn’t be accepted in society, or wouldn’t be considered law-abiding people, or even if it meant they’d risk their lives.

After all, as Jesus hits here, if they were offended and walked away at this good news, how were they going to be able to accept what was coming...for they would see him tortured and crucified, and then they would see him risen from the dead and ascending into heaven. If that isn’t hard to accept, I’m not sure what is.

“But even through that, the good news is as he said it here: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of

me. This is the bread that came down from heaven.”

From this point in his ministry, Jesus focused more and more on those who stayed with him, preparing them to live the difficult but Spirit-filled life of following him. Jesus had been on offense through this chapter, saying pointed things so that people would recognize what he meant, but he also trained his disciples to guard themselves in a world that would be hostile...that wouldn't accept his truth and would be offended by his grace.

As for us, we are the ones who know that on the other side of the cross, God revealed the good news that Jesus who died for our sins is risen and gives life. We know that the greatest offense to God was indeed an invitation to draw closer to Him. So we live not as offended people— or even as offending people— but as people given the good news, called to show people how to trust God and draw near to him, no matter what His will may be.