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“A God Who Never “Walks It Back” ”

Text: John 6:51-69

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we come to the conclusion of Jesus' teaching through John chapter 6. And we've moved; we're in a different location now. What began in the wilderness with Jesus feeding the 5,000 and then moved across the Sea of Galilee now ends in the synagogue at Capernaum. Apparently the people who followed Jesus across the sea continued to follow Him and continued asking Him questions about the feeding and His teaching. That's good. But then we hear that after this day, that stopped. That ***after this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*** Many who were following Him walked away.

Why? Well, in their own words they said: ***This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*** But it wasn't the words of Jesus that were too hard to understand; the people understood full well what He was saying. This wasn't an intelligence or learning issue - it was a faith issue. These words of Jesus were too hard to accept; too hard to believe. These words of Jesus were too different, and maybe even offensive. That He came down from heaven, that He gives life, that He gives His flesh and blood as food and drink, that He is the Bread of Life. And so many walked away. And that's not good.

But notice what *doesn't* happen here: Jesus doesn't “walk it back.” That's a phrase that has become popular in our day and age. When someone says something that creates an uproar or offends someone, they “walk it back” - they try to explain what they said in terms that are more acceptable; they try to soften it, perhaps become a little more vague, try to settle things down. *I didn't really mean it that way. You misunderstood what I was saying. I was using that word differently than what you assumed. Let me parse that for you.* That's “walking it back.”

But Jesus doesn't walk back what He said. You might think He'd want to, given that many are leaving. But no. He doesn't say: Oh, you misunderstood. He doesn't tone it down. He doesn't try to explain Himself further or make His teaching more acceptable, more palatable. Because He meant what He said. He really does give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink in His Supper. He really is the Bread of Life. And we really have no hope of life apart from Him. It's all true. Jesus was there in the beginning and created life, and He continues to give life, He sustains life, and only He can give eternal life. So He doesn't walk it back.

For the truth is never a popularity contest. Jesus isn't trying to get elected as Saviour or leader of Israel. He isn't trolling for votes. He IS the Saviour. As we prayed in the Collect of the Day earlier: *He IS the way, the truth, and the life.* This is the truth. This is the way it must be. He will lay down His life for the life of the world and feed us with Himself. And unless we feed on Him, unless we are born from above, unless we receive His forgiveness, unless we live in Him and He in us, we do not and will not have life. *This is the Word of the Lord.*

Now that makes many grumble today as it did in Jesus' day. Those things are just not popular or mainstream. Those things make people get up and walk away today. Which is what will happen if the starting point of how we think is our life, our efforts, our wisdom, and what makes sense to us. We'll rely on ourselves and think we are capable of much more than we really are, and reject words and teaching that seem to disagree with that.

But from God's perspective, it's quite a different thing. When God looks at the world, He doesn't see potential, He doesn't see wisdom, He doesn't see ingenuity, He doesn't see a bunch of people that just need a little help to get over the hump. He sees a world of rebellion, not goodness; a world deceived, not in truth; a world of death, not life; a world of people who think they know better than God; *a world in need of saving.* A world to which He could not say: *Do this and live,* for we cannot do it. Adam would not and so we cannot.

So here's the good news: *God doesn't walk it back.* Yes, that's good news. God doesn't walk back the truth to appease us and our self-promoting, self-glorifying way. And this too: the God who does not walk back His words also does not walk back His presence or His promise. What He says is the truth, and what He says He will do. And so when faced with our sin, rebellion, and death said: *I will do it. I will save.*

And so He sent His Son, who did not walk back from an incarnation into a sinful world; who did not walk back from the temptation, from the hate, from the scourging, from the cross; who did not walk back from taking our sin and uncleanness upon Himself; who did not walk back from being forsaken for you. He willingly did these things. And though many walked away from Him, He would not walk away from them.

And so you know this as well: **He will not walk away from you.** You who have come here after another week wallowing in sin. Another week of failing to do what you should have done - failing to love God and love your neighbor. Another week of doing what you should not have done - loving and serving yourself. Another week of half-truths and parsed words to get what you want. Another week of unclean desires, wicked thoughts, grudges and bitterness. You've come here after being steeped and marinated in your sins, reeking of those sins. You walk in here like a bum off the streets of hell . . . **and your Saviour does not walk back from you.** Instead He embraces you with His love, kisses you with His forgiveness, and rejoices over you at His Table. He came into this world for

you and He's still coming for you. And there's no place that He'd rather be than here, and nothing He'd rather be doing than forgiving and feeding prodigals like us.

And how different is that? We're not used to that. We're used to people who walk away for a lot less than that. Friends, spouses, family, who cut us off, who turn away, often for the stupidest things, and who won't even give us a chance to repent. Or if they do, would rather hold a grudge and hold it over us rather than forgive. Maybe you've even done it yourself.

That's who your God is. A God who won't walk back from you. A God who loves bums and serves sinners. A God who came to die, not condemn; whose glory is the cross. If you don't know that, if you don't know God like that, then you won't believe even, as Jesus said, *if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before*; even if you see Him rise from the dead, as Jesus said elsewhere (Luke 16:31). Because you won't know that He does these things **for you**. You'll grumble, like the people then, that God isn't being very God-like. You'll complain that you're not getting what you deserve. You'll think you're not getting the credit and praise you got coming. You'll be offended at being called *sinner* . . . and walk away.

But if you don't walk away, you'll hear most wonderful words. *I baptize you. I forgive you. You are my son, my daughter. Today you will be with me in Paradise. Come to the feast. This is My Body, this is My Blood. Peace. Well done, good and faithful servant.* These are **the words of eternal life**. Gift words. God-for-you words. That you too **believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God**. That the baby in the manger is the Holy One of God. That the man rejected in His own hometown is the Holy One of God. That that one hanging out with prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, and lepers is the Holy One of God. That the criminal being scourged and mocked and then hung up on a cross is the Holy One of God. That this one who looks anything but holy and god-like is the Holy One of God. The Holy One of God **for you**. For you unholy, to make you holy, with a holiness you do not have and cannot have apart from Him.

That's the truth, and Jesus will not walk it back. He is faithful to His Father and steadfast for you. And so His call goes out still today: don't walk away, repent. Don't walk away, listen. Hear His words of eternal life. And through those words the Spirit will work and the Father will draw us to Himself. That's the only way. To walk away is to walk back to sin and death, but faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

So hear. You may not understand everything and have all the answers. That's okay. You don't have to have them; He does. He who knows all things and knows you, His child. He knows your need and has come to fill you with Himself. So if you're ever tempted to walk back, do this instead: walk back to your baptism, and remember your adoption there as a child of God and the forgiveness He has promised you. Walk back to the mercy promised you in absolution. And walk back to this altar, to the Body and Blood given and

shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. And you have His promise: that in this eating and drinking there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. As *often* as you do this. For the flesh of the One who won your forgiveness on the cross is placed into your mouth. The life-blood of the One who poured out His life for you is poured over your lips. The One who gave everything for you, holding back not one little thing, holds back nothing here either. Forgiveness, life, and salvation yours. And He will not walk it back.

So what ever happened to those folks that day who walked away? We're not told. But I'll bet Jesus prayed for them. For after this day Jesus went to the cross and died for them and their sin too. And maybe later they came back. Maybe they were among the 3,000 who were baptized at Pentecost.

And He prays for you, just as He died for you.

And what about those who walk away today? Well, don't give up on them either. Pray for them. And tell them, when you have the chance, of a God who doesn't walk it back, and what good news that is. That His gifts are here for sinners like us. That His life is here for us who die. So come and get it! Come and get Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.