

**“This is a Hard Saying; Who Can Listen to It?”**

**John 6:59-71**

**October 20, 2019**

**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**

*Pr. Nicoletti*

Our Scripture reading this morning is from The Gospel of John, chapter six, verses fifty-nine through seventy-one. It comes at the end of a long dialogue between Jesus and the crowd that followed him after the feeding of the five-thousand. Jesus has taught them repeatedly at this point that he is the bread of life that came down from heaven, he has told them that they must believe in him to have eternal life, he has told them that only those the Father draws will come to him, and he has told them that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink. And now those who have been following him will respond and react to the claims he has been making.

And so, with that in mind we begin in John chapter six, verse fifty-nine.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

<sup>6:59</sup> Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup> It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) <sup>65</sup> And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

<sup>66</sup> After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” <sup>70</sup> Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” <sup>71</sup> He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, we gather this morning because we love your Word.  
We want it to be our meditation day and night.  
We know that your revelation to us  
offers more wisdom than the wise of this world,  
it gives us more understanding than the great thinkers of this world,  
it gives us deeper understanding than the old and experienced of this world.  
It holds us back from evil,

and keeps us from straying from you.  
And it is sweet to us,  
sweeter than honey in our mouths.  
Through it we gain understanding,  
and we learn to reject every false way.  
Teach us now from your word, we ask.  
In Jesus's name. Amen  
[Based on Psalm 119:97-104]

Our text this morning is about how we handle the hard sayings that Jesus brings to us – the difficult claims that the Christian faith makes.

In the verses leading up to our text this morning, Jesus said a number of things that to his hearers were not only highly implausible, but downright offensive.

To begin with, Jesus has made the claim that he had come down from heaven. Then, when the crowd asked him to perform a sign, and to provide them with more bread, he refused. And on top of that, he emphatically claimed that he was the bread of life, and unless they ate his flesh and drank his blood, they could not have true and eternal life.

And we need to appreciate that each of these things were offensive to the crowd of first-century Jews gathered there.

For one thing, Jesus claimed to come down from heaven – a statement that besides being implausible to them, also placed Jesus above Moses and the prophets – a bold and somewhat offensive claim for many pious Jews. [Carson, 300]

Second, the crowd was looking for a king who might help them with their immediate needs – both material and political. They knew Jesus had the power to perform miracles – they had seen him feed them, a crowd of over five thousand, with just five loaves and two fish. Jesus is powerful, and the crowd can see many ways he could serve them with his power – whether by providing them with more sustenance, or overthrowing their Roman overlords. Jesus seems to be able to do such things ... but he won't. He refuses. He withdrew from them when they wanted to make him king, and refused to provide them with more bread.

Third, Jesus's claim that they must feed on his flesh and drink his blood would be repugnant to them. Most of us recoil at such cannibalistic language. But the offense would have been compounded by the reference to drinking blood, as the Jews had been strictly commanded not to consume the blood of any animal.

In each of these ways (and in likely a few more), Jesus had said difficult things to those gathered – offensive things even, as we read in verse sixty-one. And so, they begin to grumble.

And those who grumble are not just those who were antagonistic to Jesus – not scribes and Pharisees – but “disciples,” we are told in verse sixty. Those who had been following Jesus, who had been listening to him, who had traveled across the sea to hear him and be with him – these *disciples* begin to grumble. They begin to be offended by what Jesus has said.

And what do they say?

“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

They begin with that statement in verse sixty ... and by verse sixty-six, many of them have turned back and are no longer walking with Jesus.

The difficulty that our text confronts us with is that Christianity in general, and Jesus specifically, bring us many hard sayings, which we struggle to listen to.

We have a tendency to act in our post-Christian culture like this is somehow new. It can feel new to some of us, but it is by no means new historically. We see it right here in the first-century, in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Christianity in general, and Jesus specifically, bring us many hard sayings, which we struggle to listen to.

In our text it comes primarily in the forms of Jesus’s claim to be greater than Moses and the prophets, his refusal to perform the miraculous signs that the people demand, and his claim that feeding on him will bring eternal life.

Those were the sayings that were particularly hard for these first-century Jews. So, what might be claims that have the same effects on twenty-first century people living in the U.S. today? What are the claims of Christ and Christianity that make us and others say, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

We might think of such difficult sayings falling into three major categories. As modern western people we find hard sayings in the doctrinal claims of Christ, in the ethical claims of Christ, and in the providential claims of Christ.

First, modern people find hard and offensive words and sayings in the doctrinal claims of Christianity – in the content of its teaching about God and the world.

And when we think of “hard sayings” in the sense of our text, we don’t mean teaching that is confusing or difficult to understand so much as we mean teaching that modern people find distressing or offensive.

We might take for example the doctrine of hell – the doctrine that those who ultimately and finally reject God will continue to exist forever, but in the suffering and distress of the separation from God that they have chosen.

And many non-Christians find the idea offensive. Bertrand Russell, for example, in his essay “Why I Am Not a Christian” wrote: “There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell.” Russell goes on: “I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”

Many people in our culture would agree with Russell’s rejection of any concept of eternal punishment. And yet, Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Bible. And when

modern people come across that – when they hear Jesus’s teaching on the subject – it is not uncommon for them to respond with something like “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

And the struggle with doctrines like hell is not limited to those outside the Church. As I’ve discussed a couple times in prayer meeting recently, David Bentley Hart, a well-known apologist for the Christian faith, has recently put out a book himself, denying the traditional doctrine of hell. I haven’t read the book, though I’ve read a few reviews, and from those I have increasingly gotten the impression that Hart’s argument in the end is a very technical, very sophisticated version of stating: “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

And as such great minds within the Church take offense at and struggle with such doctrines, we should not be surprised when ordinary Christians do as well. Over the years that I taught apologetics at Covenant High School and Springfield it was not uncommon to come across students who struggled with the doctrine of hell – students who found it to be a hard saying.

And the doctrine of hell is only one example. There’s also the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine of human depravity, the doctrine that salvation is only to be found through faith in Christ, the doctrine of God’s creational intention in the area of gender – we could go on and on.

Christ and Christianity proclaim many hard *doctrines*, which we struggle to listen to. That’s a first area.

A second area is ethics. Christ and Christianity give many hard *ethical* teachings, which we struggle to listen to.

And again, here, I’m not primarily referring to ethical statements we agree with but have a hard time living up to – but I mean those commands in the Bible that we struggle to actually believe are good and right.

One obvious place that this comes up is how many respond to the Christian sexual ethic today.

Take for one example the teaching that sex is to be only within marriage. The non-Christian world around us finds this repressive at best, and oppressive at worst. In either case it is harmful to human flourishing in their minds.

But that view is not limited to those outside the Church. Talking with other pastors, even in other parts of the country, the trend emerges that more and more Christians are having sex before marriage, and *not* because they made a mistake which they regret, but because but because they find the Christian ethic perplexing. It doesn’t make sense to them. And so, they decide to disregard it. Both skeptics and disciples look at the Christian restriction of sex to marriage and say, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

And the same is of course true of Christ’s teaching that marriage is rooted in sexual difference and so it is to be between a man and a woman. The non-Christian world finds that position not only offensive, but hateful and bigoted.

But once again, finding that teaching hard is not limited to those outside the Church. Many Christians find themselves perplexed and even distressed by the Bible’s teaching in this area.

And while they submit to the Bible, they wish its teaching was different. And so even as they hold to the Bible's teaching, they may look at it and say to themselves "This is a hard saying; it is difficult to listen to it."

And this is all only in the area of sexual ethics. We could go on and talk about the Christian call to love our enemies – a teaching both non-Christians and Christians have seemed to jettison as unpractical in the political and culture wars of our nation. Or we could consider Christ's teaching regarding greed, or responding to those in authority. The list of Christ's ethical commands that we find hard to accept is a long one.

We see that in the area of doctrine. We see it in the area of ethics.

And third, we see it in the area of providence.

Christ and Christianity teach that God is good, that God is powerful and sovereign ... and that evil and suffering still occur in this world.

Now on one level, we as Christians know that God is not the cause of the sin and suffering in the world – humanity brought those things into the world when our first parents rebelled against God, and it has continued to affect all things, especially as humanity continues its rebellion.

In general, that makes sense to most Christians.

But it is the specifics that get difficult. Because Christ tells us that God is sovereign over *how* sin and suffering play out in this world. Over the details. And very often, the way the details play out seem to us to be perplexing, distressing, and even offensive.

Solomon summed it up well in Ecclesiastes 8:14, when he says "There is a vapor that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vapor." He goes on a few verses later to say that when it comes to the work of God in this life, "man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out." (8:17)

In other words, it frequently happens that bad things happen to good people while good things happen to bad people. And most of the time no one here on earth can figure out why – no matter how much you work to figure it out, no matter how wise you are, you cannot figure out why God in his providence allowed it to happen this way.

Brothers and sisters, if we need any proof of that fact, we should think back to our petitions just a few minutes ago.

We look at the suffering that is going on in places like Syria and Lebanon – suffering brought to children, suffering that comes onto the people of God, and we cannot fathom *why* God would allow things to play out this way.

We hear of Jonathan Mosely's cancer, and we think of his kindness and faith and all he and his family have been through and we cannot understand *why* God would allow this now.

We hear of Lindsey Skogen's death ... a young and faithful mother of four ... and while we know she is experiencing the joy of being with Christ her savior now, we still cannot understand why God would take her like this from her husband, and her loved ones, and her four little children.

And as we think of those who are suffering, we look around us and we see the wicked prospering. We see those who are so much less deserving living in comfort, while so many who are faithful are afflicted.

And we are told, rightly and truly, that as we confessed in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism this morning, that none of these things can happen apart from the will of our Father in heaven.

And for many of us, even as we believe, even as we hold on in faith, some part of us says in our hearts "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

And so, whether in the area of doctrine, or of ethics, or of providence, Christ brings us many hard sayings – many difficult claims – which we struggle to listen to and believe.

Where does it most come out for you? Where do you find yourself hearing the words of Christ, hearing the words of the Christian Scriptures, and feeling on some level, even if you continue to firmly hold to the faith – still you feel on some level the same words that the disciples spoke in verse sixty: "Lord, this is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Such struggles are not limited to non-Christians. And they are not limited to new believers. They are the struggles and temptations that all people face in this life.

The question is not *if* you will face such struggles – such temptations and doubts. The question is *how* you will face them. The question is *how* you will respond.

And as a model for how we should respond, this text gives us Peter.

In verses sixty-six through sixty-nine we read: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So, Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'"

And as we consider how *we* should respond to such struggles, we should note three things about this interaction.

First, we should note Jesus's question. Second, we should note Peter's understanding of his options. And third, we should note Peter's answer.

So first, we should pay attention to Jesus's question.

And what I mean is this: Jesus does not ask the twelve “Do you understand?” He also doesn’t say to them: “It’s a hard saying for them, but it’s easier for you, right?” Jesus doesn’t turn to the disciples and say, “This is makes perfect sense to you guys ... right?”

Jesus doesn’t ask if they understand, he doesn’t ask if it’s easier for them to hear it – Jesus’s question is “Do you want to go away as well?”

Jesus’s question – his challenge to them – is “You have heard these hard sayings – even so, will you continue to follow me? Even so, will you stay with me?”

*His primary question is about trust, not understanding.*

That’s the first thing we see.

The second thing we need to note is how Peter understands his options. The first part of his response is: “Lord, to whom shall we go?”

Peter, right at the moment when he is challenged, recognizes that we all have to go to and trust someone. We all have to go to and trust someone.

In other words, Peter recognizes that there is no neutral ground. He will always in the end have to trust and follow *someone* ... even if that someone is himself.

And that framing is essential when it comes to how we deal with the hard sayings that Christ brings to us.

Because any time we doubt one worldview, we must do it from the vantage point of another worldview. And every worldview we hold to, we hold to by trust – by belief ... by faith.

We might think of it like being on a ship at sea. And someone comes along and tells us that they think our ship is not safe, and that we must get out of it or we will be in danger.

But out in the open ocean there is no neutral ground – there is no neutral land on which to stand and question our boat. Anyone urging us to get out of our boat because it is unsafe, is also, whether they acknowledge it or not, asking us to get *into* their boat.

Which means the question is not primarily about whether we perfectly understand and can defend every aspect of our ship to explain how it is working right ... the question is whether the alternative boat we are being urged to get into is really better – is really safer than where we are. Being in a boat is unavoidable. The question is which we can trust.

Every doubt and challenge to the Christian faith comes from an alternative faith – an alternative worldview. And to step away from trusting Christ is to step towards trusting in something else instead – whether that something else is ourselves or some other authority or community.

In every area, the question is not just whether or not to trust the words of Christ, but should we trust the words of Christ or the words of someone else. The question, properly understood, is: “To *whom* shall we go?”

Peter realized that. If he were to walk away from Jesus he would be walking, spiritually, towards someone else instead – someone he would choose to trust more than Jesus: whether it was the scribes, or the Pharisees, or the crowd, or his own judgment. In any case, trusting someone else was unavoidable – there was no neutral ground. He would have to get into someone else’s boat.

That’s the second thing we see.

So first, Jesus doesn’t ask them if they understand, he asks them whether they will trust him or leave him.

Second, Peter recognizes that there is no neutral ground in the struggle – whatever he does he will be trusting someone as his ultimate authority.

Third and finally – and this is the main point we will spend more time on – Peter answers Jesus.

And his answer is “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

The third thing we see – the *main* thing we see – in Peter’s answer, is that even if we are perplexed and distressed, if Jesus is the Holy One of God, who has the words of eternal life, then there is nowhere else we can go, and no one else we should seek to put our ultimate trust in, besides him.

Let me say that again: Peter’s answer is that even if we are perplexed and distressed, if Jesus is the Holy One of God, who has the words of eternal life, then there is nowhere else we can go, and no one else we should seek to put our ultimate trust in, besides him.

Now ... in some ways that is simple enough. That makes sense to most Christians in the abstract. But what does it actually look like? How does it play out in the areas we have already spoken of this morning?

Let’s take a little time to consider that before we close.

We said that the hard sayings of Jesus and the Christian Scriptures which can distress us can be doctrinal, ethical, or providential.

Let’s consider the doctrinal.

Tim Keller makes a helpful point on those doctrines, like the doctrine of hell, that we struggle with.

He writes:

“I urge people to consider that their problems with some [Christian] texts [or teachings] might be based on an unexamined belief in the superiority of their historical moment over all others. We must not universalize our time any more than we should universalize our culture.

He goes on:

“Consider the views of contemporary British people and how they differ from the views of their ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons, a thousand years ago. Imagine that both are reading the Bible and they come to the gospel of Mark, chapter 14. First, they read that Jesus claims to be the Son of Man, who will come with angels at the end of time to judge the whole world according to his righteousness [...]. Later they read about Peter, the leading apostle, who denies his master three times and at the end even curses him to save his skin [...]. Yet later Peter is forgiven and restored to leadership [...]. The first story [of the end of time] will make contemporary British people shudder. It sounds so judgmental and exclusive. However, they will love the story about how even Peter can be restored and forgiven. [On the other hand,] the first story will not bother the Anglo-Saxons at all. They know all about Doomsday, and they are glad to get more information about it! However, they will be shocked at the second story [about Peter]. Disloyalty and betrayal at Peter’s level must never be forgiven, in their view. He doesn’t deserve to live, let alone become the foremost apostle. They will be so appalled by this that they will want to throw the Bible down and read it no more.

“Of course, we think of the Anglo-Saxons as primitive, but someday others will think of us and our culture’s dominant views as primitive. How can we use our time’s standard of ‘progressive’ as the plumb line by which we decide which parts of the Bible are valid and which are not? Many of the beliefs of our grandparents and great-grandparents now seem silly and even embarrassing to us. That process is not going to stop now. Our grandchildren will find many of our views outmoded as well. Wouldn’t it be tragic if we threw the Bible away over a belief that will soon look pretty weak or wrong? *To stay away from Christianity because part of the Bible’s teaching is offensive to you assumes that if there is a God he wouldn’t have any views that upset you. Does that belief make sense?*” [Keller, 111-112, emphasis added]

Keller’s point is this: Almost always, the parts of the Bible we struggle with are areas where our culture – where the world around us – holds to a different view than Jesus presents us with. That doesn’t mean that our feelings that agree with our culture are insincere – they are *our* feelings – but we need to appreciate where they came from. The world we live in shapes us – that’s why our struggles with Jesus’s teaching have more in common with modern British people than with the Anglo-Saxons of the eleventh century.

But Keller recognizes, just as Peter did, that to distrust one authority will be to choose to trust another. To reject Jesus’s teaching on one topic or doctrine is to trust someone else’s view – usually the view of our culture.

The question is: “To whom shall we go?”

And do we really believe that the one we go to should be our culture? Are we really willing to say that our culture has “arrived”? That we’ve got it all right, and that any God who might exist would therefore obviously have to agree with our culture about *everything*?

Or is it likely that just like every generation before us ... just like every culture besides us ... so we too are likely right about some things ... and wrong about some things – even if we are blind ourselves to which is which?

And if that is so, then shouldn’t we expect a true God – a God who is right about everything – to have some “hard sayings” for us, just as he would for any other culture and any other generation?

And so, if Jesus truly is the Holy One of God, then we should *expect* him to have some hard truths to teach us. And that is in fact exactly what we find.

Jesus doesn't ask us to immediately understand each of his teachings we find hard. He asks us simply to trust him. He asks us to stick with him despite the struggle.

He asks us for what St. Anselm and other Christians over the centuries have referred to as "faith seeking understanding." We seek to understand – we work to understand. But the starting point is not understanding. The starting point is faith. The starting point is trust – trust in the words of Jesus because of who he is – because he is the Holy One of God.

In the area of doctrine and teaching, even if we are perplexed and distressed, if Jesus is the Holy One of God, who has the words of eternal life, then there is nowhere else we can go, and no one else we should seek to put our ultimate trust in, besides him.

That's true in the area of doctrine. And it's true in a very similar way in the area of ethics.

Because just as we saw with the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons and the twenty-first century British, regarding doctrine, so too do many different cultures differ on ethical teachings.

In many traditional cultures, for example, the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage would seem obvious, while Jesus's teaching on forgiving those whose actions bring shame on us might seem preposterous. In other modern cultures, on the other hand, it's the command to forgive even those who do things that cause us shame and embarrassment that rings true, while the command to sexual chastity seems ridiculous.

And so once again, if we reject the ethical teachings of Christ and the Christian Scriptures, then we are saying that our particular time and place – our particular culture or subculture – have arrived at the perfect perspective on every issue of ethics and morality, and so any real God would have to agree with us completely.

And again, we must ask: Do we really believe that? Do we really think that the ethical instincts of our day are the best there ever have been *and* the best there ever will be?

Or ... once again ... is it likely that like every other culture and every other generation, we too may be very right about some things and very wrong about others?

And if that is so, then wouldn't we expect that if the true God were to arrive, then he would have some corrections for us – just as he would for any other culture? Wouldn't we expect that he would have words that would lead us to true human flourishing – to true life – words that we do not have on our own?

And so once again, if Jesus is the Holy One of God, if he has the words of eternal life, then we should expect him to confront us and correct us on what is good and what is right. If he is the one who made humanity, then we should expect him to know what leads to human flourishing *better than we do*.

And so if you look at the Christiana sexual ethic, or you look at the Christian call to love your enemies, and you cannot see how that would lead to true human flourishing, then Jesus's first call to you is not to understand *how* his commands are better than those of the world around you. His first call is for you to confess that he knows what leads to human flourishing better than you do. Your second step is to obey, even if you don't yet understand. And then – *then*, as you trust Christ, as you stay with him and continue to walk with him – *then* your calling is to seek to understand why he commands what he does. *Then* you are to seek to have your moral imagination renewed and transformed by the One who has the words of eternal life.

So, we see the call to trust Christ in the area of doctrine, and in the area of ethics.

Third, we are called to trust Christ in the midst of *providences* that perplex and distress us.

And in some senses, while we might grow in our own understanding of doctrine and ethics, that is less true in the area of providence. Providence far more often keeps its secrets.

J. I. Packer has put it like this – he writes: “The truth is that God in his wisdom, to make and keep us humble and to teach us to walk by faith, has hidden from us almost everything that we should like to know about the providential purposes which he is working out in the churches and in our own lives.” [Packer, 106]

Christ calls us, in this life, to trust him, even when understanding is unavailable to us.

And once again we are reminded that we cannot avoid trusting someone. If we say that the God revealed in Jesus Christ does not do right in how he orders our lives and the lives of others, then we must claim that our wisdom is greater than his. But the absurdity of that should strike us immediately.

In her novel *Gilead*, Marilyn Robinson describes a character during the Cold War reflecting on how his cat, named Soapy, views the world. He says “This world embraces and exceeds Soapy's [the cat's] understanding of it. Soapy might be a victim of ideological conflict right along with the rest of us, if things get out of hand. She would no doubt make some feline appraisal of the situation, which would have nothing to do with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat or the Manhattan Project. The inadequacy of her concepts would have nothing to do with the reality of the situation.” [Robinson, 143]

And this is exactly what the Bible tells us is true of us. The cosmos are bigger than we imagine. As in the Book of Job, the events of this world may be tied up in the cosmic spiritual battles between God and the spiritual beings who have rebelled against him. The events of our lives may be a battlefield between God and the Devil, with our ongoing faith in God determining the victor. Like a cat living in the middle of the Cold War, we see and comprehend only a shadow of what is going on. Our call is to recognize that neither we nor any other creature can claim to know better than God as to how events should be ordered. To whom shall we go? To the Holy One – the only One who can be trusted to run all things.

That doesn't mean that we become Stoics and call evil good. Sin is sin and calamity is calamity. It also does not mean that we are not to mourn. We mourn the sin and brokenness and suffering of this world. But we do not mourn as those who have no hope. Even as we lament, we trust that

God is working things out in the way that is best, even if we are utterly perplexed and distressed by it. We trust him not because we understand, but because we know that his wisdom is above ours.

And as we place our trust in Christ's wisdom, he also directs us to trust in his love and his purpose.

We are reminded that Christ does not direct providence from afar, but that he came down and joined us – subjecting himself to far more suffering on the cross than he calls any of his people to.

And along with that, we are reminded of the destination Christ is working us and his world towards – a new heaven and a new earth, in which God and his people dwell together forever, with no more sickness, no more crying, and no more pain.

We may not understand why Christ has chosen the path he has to get some of his people to that destination. But we trust *him*. We trust *his* wisdom. We trust *his* love. We trust *his* power. And we trust *his* purpose.

In Peter's answer we are reminded that even if we are perplexed and distressed, since Jesus is the Holy One of God, who has the words of eternal life, there is no where else we could go, or should seek to put our ultimate trust in, besides him.

That is the call Jesus give us here.

But even as he gives us this call, he promises his help.

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” And Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit on his people. He calls us to trust, he calls us to keep walking with him. But he provides the Holy Spirit to help us with every step.

And so, as you are confronted with the hard sayings of our Lord, ask for his help. Cry out to him as the father in Mark 9 did, saying “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

And then, when you struggle, when doubts rise in your mind, look to Christ your Lord, and leaning on the power of his Spirit, declare with the Apostle Peter: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and I have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

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