

August 22, 2021

Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

“Do Mean To Bug Ya”

Ephesians 6:10-20 Common English Bible

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. 11 Put on God’s armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. 12 We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. 13 Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. 14 So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, 15 and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. 16 Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word. 18 Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers. 19 As for me, pray that when I open my mouth, I’ll get a message that confidently makes this secret plan of the gospel known. 20 I’m an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel. Pray so that the Lord will give me the confidence to say what I have to say.

John 6:56-69 Common English Bible

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn’t like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.” 59 Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. 60 Many of his disciples who heard this said, “This message is harsh. Who can hear it?” 61 Jesus knew that the disciples were grumbling about this and he said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 What if you were to see the Human One going up where he was before? 63 The Spirit is the one who gives life and the flesh doesn’t help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and

life. 64 Yet some of you don't believe." Jesus knew from the beginning who wouldn't believe and the one who would betray him. 65 He said, "For this reason I said to you that none can come to me unless the Father enables them to do so." 66 At this, many of his disciples turned away and no longer accompanied him. 67 Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" 68 Simon Peter answered, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are God's holy one."

I was at a ventriloquist show one night and the joke was made about preachers being kind of dumb and naive! I was offended so I shouted to the guy, "Hey, that's offensive, how can you just lump all us preachers together regardless of our training or our intelligence or anything?" And the ventriloquist promptly apologized to me and said he would not make any more jokes about preachers being less than intelligent or naive...to which I shouted, "Hey that's nice but I was actually talking to the guy on your lap!"

Do you know why the burglar was so easily offended? Well it's because he took things personally!

Dolly Parton once said, "No, I'm not offended by jokes about blondes not being very intelligent, because I know I'm intelligent and I know I'm not really a blonde!"

The singer Bono from the group U2 has a speech he gives right after the group sings a song titled "Silver and Gold." he is trying to get the audience to understand they do need to stand up against apartheid...and after his speech he says, "Did I bug ya? Didn't mean to bug ya..." That's kind of what Jesus says today when he asks if he offended the crowd. Sometimes...well, maybe it is the time to bug some folks.

When Ephesians 6 speaks of "the shield of faith," most readers today envision an individual warrior bearing that defensive weapon. In ancient warfare, though, shields were most effectively used in concert with comrades-in-arms, to form what was called a "shield wall." The slightly

curved, rectangular Roman shields, covering the entire torso from shoulders to knees, were designed to interlock with the shields of fellow soldiers.

The Romans' highly developed shield-wall strategy was known as the testudo formation. Those on the front line arranged their shields vertically, overlapping the shields of their neighbors. The second rank held their shields over their heads, protecting not only themselves but also the soldiers in front of them. This tortoise-like formation – while slow-moving and not very nimble – was a formidable defense. It protected combatants not only from a frontal assault with swords, spears and battle-axes, but also from rocks and arrows raining down from above. As long as the shield-wall held, a swift frontal assault could be turned into a punishing battle of attrition, which the Romans nearly always won.

It's fitting that the apostle writes, in Ephesians 6:16, of “the shield of faith,” because faith is most effectively exercised not in isolation, but in community. So, as I start this sermon today...I am trusting that we all come here with a degree of faith...and the desire to have a stronger faith...a faith that will help to protect and keep us safe when the times get difficult and the storms of life are raging.

So that sets us up to hear what our Lord Jesus says to his earliest followers in our John passage. I am going to start with what happens in John 6:66, which for me is an interesting # for this verse to have! It says, “At this, many of his disciples turned away and no longer accompanied him.” So, at the time of this story, these events...a bunch of the ones who were seemingly following Jesus turned away. Now, I don't think Jesus and I have much in common on this because if it had been me...I would have been devastated if a bunch of folks just decided to stop supporting me and going with me on whatever mission and ministry we had agreed upon. Think about it...this verse says, “MANY of his disciples turned away,” MANY of them...and it calls them disciples.

It does not say, many of the weirdo's who were fakers left. Though one sure can decide that they must have been fake if they left at this point.

This all begs the question of WHY did they leave? What had Jesus said that made them think he was not the ONE they thought or hoped he was?

And the answer to that is Jesus had been talking to them about the Bread of Life. For the past couple of weeks we have been discussing Jesus and his feeding of the 5000 and how he then told them if ate his true bread, meaning his body or what we understand to be symbolic of his sacrifice then they would never be hungry at least spiritually again.

Now...we see in verse 56-59 that Jesus said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn’t like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

So...the ones who got offended and left they were not able to understand or accept that Jesus was comparing himself favorably to the manna that came down from heaven during Moses’ time. The people all believed that God had given the people of Moses a special food that was in answer to their need and their prayer. This food God provided was wondrous and it literally saved their lives. This food got them through a long and arduous journey and it had become, and is still to this day, an amazing and revered story that was told and retold showing how God treated his favored people. If you were one of those who considered yourself an “insider” then hearing how God sent Manna to your ancestors made you feel special as well. And then along comes this fellow who could work miracles and who called himself the Son of Man and he tells you that if you eat of him then it is better than what the followers of Moses got...and that if you ate of his body and drank of his blood then you would never be hungry or thirsty again.

And many of the folks it says, got offended at this and walked away! I have often wondered why for me, in the life God has given me to live, I have found it difficult to really be fully committed to things. When you read of the ones who make it big you always hear how things did not

always go their way and how they overcame the obstacles even if they had moments when they felt like quitting and they stuck to it and achieved something great.

I was discussing this with Anita this week. I always wanted to be a basketball player, but in our high school there was a maximum amount of players and so they had to cut boys who were in their opinion not as good as the others. In both my Freshman and Sophomore years I got cut. And I was devastated! So, when my junior year came around I didn't even try again. Remember a few years ago when there was a has been player named Michael Jordan? He got cut from his High School team and somehow did ok afterwards. He decided to go out again! What if he had just quit? And I know Michael Jordan is kind of out of everyone's league when it comes to basketball talent, but you get my point. We know that in most everything we want to achieve there will come tests and challenges and we know it will be very difficult sometimes...and yet, if we want to keep going and get to where we believe we are being called we will persevere.

When I was in seminary I started working for the Rev. John Jerome Lauer. John was a unique man and Anita and I fully believe God sent us to work with John at that time for a specific reason. John, though, did not have it easy. When he was in High School or College, he was in church one Sunday and he audibly heard the voice of God say to him, "John go and preach!" So he KNEW he was called to be a pastor. Now heres the kicker...the Methodist Church did NOT hear God say this so they were a bit harder to convince! Seminary after seminary turned him down. I can't remember exactly how many seminaries turned him down but it was something like 5 or 6 of them.

So, here's a fellow who KNEW he heard God call him and yet at seemingly every turn he found a road closed sign. He was turned away. So do you know what he did after the 5th place turned him down? He applied to a 6th place and they accepted him. The problem was he lived in Nebraska...and he was accepted to seminary in a Chicago suburb! So every week, he was serving a student appointment, he got on a train on Sunday

night or Monday morning...traveled to Evanston, IL, took his classes and then on Thursday evening or Friday sometime he took the train back to Nebraska to conduct his services and do whatever else he could. He did this for three years, while he was married! They also had at least one son and another was born either just after this period of time or during it. So, in other words John had to put up with a LOT to become a pastor.

Then, well, lets just say he didn't get the cream of the crop appointments right away. Now some of that was his fault and he would admit to it. But with John he was a pastor who expected you as a parishioner to get up and get stuff done. He did not get along well with parishioners who were only wanting things to stay the same. One time he was having a difficult time in an appointment and he got madder and more adamant as he preached a sermon...he got more and more convicted that these folks needed to change and get right with God and get some stuff done on being the people God called them to be. As he preached that Sunday, his sweat was flying off of him, (John did that,) and he was talking loud, (shouting is not inaccurate,) and he started to pound his fist in his palm. AS he finished he held up his hands and he said, "The Bible tells me God loves everyone...but some days I sure can't understand that at all!" And he looked out at his charge and he left the church without shaking anyone's hand.

Can you imagine me doing that? The next day he went to the local gas station to get his car filled up and the service station attendant came out to fill up his tank and he said to John, "I hear you will be moving next June!" And by the way the service station guy did NOT attend John's church. And sure enough the next week they had called a Pastor Parish meeting and John was looking for a new appointment.

Even with all of that...John's determination and sincerity in maintaining his call from God never wavered!

Ok...so here's how it worked for me. Anita and I started exploring or at least considering the possibility of going into the ministry in about 1984. Around that time I went to our pastor's house on a FRIDAY and caught him

as he was coming out his door. I asked him if there was anyway a fellow with a family could go into the ministry and he said, "Funny you should ask me that today...I just got this in the mail...and he reached into his house and right there was the envelope that had just come from a seminary explaining how second career people could attend seminary. Anita and I took a vacation in 1986 and as part of that vacation we took Justin and our less than one year old daughter and went to a seminary in Kentucky...they accepted us right away. Then when we got back to Illinois I was put in touch with our district superintendent and he had a place in mind that wanted a young (cheap) pastor to work with youth, etc...they did not have a second parsonage so they were going to provide a housing allowance. He also knew of UDTs and had me go there and not only did they accept me but they gave me a 90% scholarship right away and the means to find more grants as well, plus they would be within easy driving range and we would not have to move. At a Walk To Emmaus during a time of intense prayer I sought out a member of the clergy team who was on that retreat and talked to him. At that point I had been really struggling with what we should do. Deacon Jesse Ramirez (I still remember his name) sat next to me and asked me a series of questions. To each of those I was able to answer that God had already provided the answer. So, finally Jesse said to me, "So, you have been accepted by your denomination, you have a place to be a student pastor...you won't have to move...that church will pay you a salary and pay your house payments, your wife has a job and she supports your call, and you have been accepted to not one but two seminaries and one of those is within driving distance and you wonder if God is calling you into the ministry??"

So, here's the deal, as John Lauer would say, some days it all seems rather easy. God calls, provides, and cares for us and it is smooth sailing. The manna is simply raining down around us. Other days, we get challenged. The manna seems different...less filling, or it's not even seemingly available. And yet, we are always given the decision to make...do we keep following or do we turn back to where it is more comfortable?

The ones who turned back...and there were a LOT of them, were the ones who as the Bible says, “Withdrew” from him. We don’t know for sure where all of them went...but I suspect a few of them were even shouting “Crucify Him” just a bit later. But that is not where the story ends. Jesus goes on to ask the ones who did not withdraw from him in the very next verse when he says, “Do you also want to leave?” And the 12 who were left looked at each other and one of them spoke up and of course it was Peter who said, “Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are God’s holy one.”

So there’s the question for each of us. Are we willing to hear the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, as he challenges us, as he calls us, and as he directs us to change? Or do we decide to withdraw? Do we take offense when it’s not the way we expected, or wanted it to be? Or do we, like Peter say, “Lord, YOU have the words of eternal life...WE believe and know YOU are God’s holy one!”

My oh my I wish I could offer and promise you a life free of change and challenge. I wish I could offer our church that...but it seems our faith is to be our shield, protecting us from the offenses and the things that are sent to bug us...but we have to be willing to use our faith, to rely upon it...and to trust in our God’s WORD. And know that our God does not give us that which only lasts for a time...rather our God, through His Son...give to us that which is eternal! Amen.