

Sermon Title: **“Do You Also Wish To Go Away?”**

Bible: **John 6:56-69 (NRSV)**

When: on Sunday, August 22nd, 2021

Where: about 25 people (including YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, as you come to us, we come to you. You came to us as a living bread. You came to us to give life. Please guide us to come to you. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer.

Amen.

1. Does this offend you? Do you also wish to go away?

Today’s Gospel reading of John from the lectionary is the response of the disciples to Jesus’ teaching: “Jesus is the living bread. Eat my flesh, and drink my blood.” Many of the disciples complained about this, because it was difficult to understand and accept. Jesus asked, “Does this offend you?” Jesus’ teachings might not have been what they were expecting or what they were thinking. Many of the disciples were complaining and grumbling. They turned back from Jesus, and did not follow Jesus anymore. Maybe only twelve disciples remained. Then, Jesus asked those remaining, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Holy One, the words of life, we will stay and follow you.” Many turned away and left Jesus. Some followed Jesus. Sometimes, following Jesus and being a disciple is difficult. How about us? Do

we follow Jesus, even though Jesus' teachings are difficult? Do we follow Jesus, even when we cannot understand Jesus?

2. Marcion's Bible

In early Christian history, after Jesus, and after the Apostle Paul, there was a man whose name was Marcion. At that time, the Bible was not like the one we have now. Actually, in his time, Christians started to collect writings to compile the Bible. They collected the books of Hebrew Scriptures, which became the Old Testament. They also collected the books of the Gospels, and the letters of the Apostle Paul, and other disciples. When Marcion collected and studied the Old Testament, he did not like God in the Old Testament. The God in the Old Testament was not the one who was loving and forgiving, but the one who was judging and punishing. To him, this God could not be with Jesus. When he made his Bible, he did not choose any books of the Hebrew Scriptures. We have four Gospels, but he chose only the Gospel of Luke, but not the whole Gospel of Luke. He selected the parts of the Gospel of Luke that he liked the most. So, his bible was very different from the Bible that we have.

3. Our Christian History

What do you think of his bible and his thoughts? Do you agree with him that the God in the Old Testament is not like Jesus Christ? If we agree with him, should we throw away the parts of the Bible that we do not understand and that we do not like? Have you faced the God whom you cannot understand? Have you encountered the God whom you do not like?

In our Christian history, we have many shameful moments. In the name of Jesus Christ, we have cursed and killed others. With the Bible scriptures, we have judged and discriminated against others. Unfortunately, we Christians have used the Bible to justify slavery, violence, sexism, and racism. Of course, we have had many great moments. But we cannot deny the shameful moments in our Christian history.

Thankfully or fortunately, unlike Marcion's efforts or expectations, we have the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament. We have four Gospels. Probably, we cannot understand all of the scriptures. Probably, we cannot love all parts of the Bible. But sometimes we can wrestle with the parts that we cannot understand and we cannot like. To me, the Bible is not equal to God. The Bible is peoples' understandings of God. There can be a good understanding, and a bad understanding of God, like our Christian history. When I read and study the Bible, I can meet not only God but also other people. Even in the Bible passages that we do not like, and even in our shameful history, I believe that we can find God's love, mercy, and grace. It is difficult. But it is not impossible, as God reveals Godself to us.

4. What is Your Answer?

Are you a fan of the 49ers? What does it mean? The 49ers' name comes from the nickname for the miners who took part in the 1849 California Gold Rush. It started the largest migration in U.S. history when they came to look for gold. But not everyone found gold and became rich; only a small number of people became truly wealthy. Many Forty Niners could dig out way more stones rather than gold.

I believe that you came to church to look for God with more passion and hunger than the forty-niners had. Unlike gold, our God is waiting for us first. Maybe, we might see God whom we do not expect. We might encounter God whom we do not understand. But our God wants to meet us, feed us, and live with us. When it is hard to follow Jesus, and when we cannot understand Jesus, Jesus may ask us, “Do you also wish to go away?” What is YOUR answer?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we are here to follow you. We are here to listen to you. We are here because you are the life. Even when we cannot understand, even when your teaching is difficult, please help us to choose you. In Jesus' name. Amen.