

Date:

*The hard sayings of Jesus*

**PRAY** 'My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you' (Psalm 63:5)...

**READ** John 6:25–71

**REFLECT**

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...* (6:54). What a strange comment! It sounds like Jesus has some odd ideas... is this cannibalism? No wonder the disciples were confused and offended (6:60,61); their hero seems to have lost his marbles. 'Couldn't you just re-phrase that a little?' And no wonder the religious leaders are outraged; in addition to the disgusting image of eating human flesh, the Law of Moses contained specific regulations about not consuming blood or even meat with blood in it (Leviticus 17:13,14).

In fact, this is one of the most important statements Jesus ever made. To understand it fully we must step back and look at the context. Jesus has just finished miraculously feeding thousands of people (John 6:1–15). Unfortunately, no one seems to understand the miracle (6:26). Most thought Jesus just liked giving away free food. Pretty cool. But Jesus fed the people to demonstrate that he was the source of eternal life (6:27). From this point on in the dialogue, though, Jesus and his listeners are on two separate tracks: *they* are thinking of worldly realities (food) while *he* is thinking of spiritual realities (eternal life).

And that's the clue we need to understand to what Jesus meant by his perplexing statement. He's not talking about physically eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Rather, he's talking about the spiritual union that he has with his followers. Those who truly put their faith and trust in Jesus are united with God (6:57) and receive eternal life (6:40).

Unfortunately, the more he explains, the more divergent the separate tracks become. His listeners are looking backwards to manna in the desert. Jesus is looking forward to what he would do on the cross.

In our time, we have an opportunity to ponder this spiritual truth whenever we take communion. The bread and wine are reminders of Jesus' sacrifice for us and are 'to be for your people the body and blood of your Son, the holy food of new and unending life in him' (*The Book of Common Prayer, Episcopal Church, US*).

**APPLY** Do you ever feel united with Jesus? When? What thoughts go through your mind as you prepare to take the bread and wine of communion?

**PRAY** Lord, please help me to draw closer to you. Open my eyes to the spiritual realities of the world I live in.

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**PRAY** Lord, please give me a better understanding of who you are as I read today.

**READ** Mark 3:20–35

**REFLECT**

*But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin* (3:29). When I was growing up, a common Sunday School question was, 'How can I know if I've committed "the unforgivable sin" or not?' We were afraid the Bible referred to some mysterious, unnamed offence. And worse, we worried that if we unwittingly committed it, we were doomed – with no chance of getting to heaven.

A careful examination of our passage today shows that Jesus didn't intend to scare children. Rather, his comment was a sharp rebuke to the religious leaders who were accusing him of being demon-possessed (3:30). The leaders had become frustrated with Jesus; he had been teaching, healing and attracting big crowds (3:20). The Pharisees got so jealous they were willing to take extreme measures to protect their turf (Mark 3:6).

That's why they accused Jesus of being demon-possessed (3:22); they wanted to discredit him in the eyes of the public. In response Jesus makes two points:

*A house divided doesn't stand.* The parable Jesus tells easily repels the false accusation (3:23–27). Satan wouldn't oppose himself. Therefore Jesus' miracles couldn't be the result of demon-possession. Interestingly, in 1858 Abraham Lincoln gave a famous speech entitled *A House Divided*, referring to this passage, to demonstrate the danger of dividing the United States into slave and free states.

*Unwillingness to repent prevents forgiveness.* By equating the work of the Holy Spirit with demon possession, says Jesus, the religious leaders were moving 180 degrees away from God. As long as they persisted in that direction, they could not be forgiven. The truth is, the 'unforgivable sin' is not some secret deed you can unwittingly commit; Jesus made it clear that he loved to forgive sinners (Luke 15:11–32). Rather, it is an ongoing refusal to accept what Jesus freely offers that prevents us from being forgiven.

**APPLY** Over the past 30 days, have you been moving closer to or further away from Jesus?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes confessing your sins to God. Then thank him for the forgiveness, love and acceptance he offers through a relationship with his Son.