

“Life-Filled Words” John 6:60-71

This week I was reading from Luis Palau’s book, “Changed by Faith” and I came across a story that pointed me to this passage. The story is about Dominic, a nine-year-old hero whose greatest feat was simply listening to and obeying his father. That simple act saved his life.

The story goes something like this. Dominic and his father went skiing together but somehow ended up on different ski lifts. When the father went looking for his son, he was nowhere to be found. And to make matters worse the weather was getting worse and worse as the night settled in. Search and rescue soon assembled 90 people to search the mountain, but after eight hours of searching, they came back cold, and tired and discouraged. There was no sign of him.

As the hours dragged on Dominic’s mother became frantic. The searchers worked through the night but were resigning themselves to the fact that this would be a recovery, not a rescue. They were feeling the effects of the cold and knew a little boy of nine had no chance of surviving out on the mountain alone. By dawn the search crew was sombre and exhausted.

But suddenly there was a glimmer of hope – a search helicopter found some ski tracks leading away from the main trails. Could this be where the missing boy went? A team was sent to follow the trail, which headed into the trees and suddenly stopped. There in the snow was a pair of skis. But two small boot prints continued towards a large tree in the forest, and the search team followed that trail. The trail ended at the base of that large tree with branches leaning against the trunk. Through the branches the searchers thought they saw color, the colors of the coat Dominic was wearing when he went missing.

There was no movement, and no sound. The searchers held their breath as they prepared for the worse. Little Dominic had spent the night alone on the mountain, unprepared and ill equipped. But as they drew near, the head of little Dominic popped up from the branches. He was very much alive and was doing very well. He shivered from the cold as his rescuers wrapped him in blankets and quickly brought him down the mountain to be checked. It was discovered he was probably in better shape than his rescuers!

This would be a great story if I stopped there, but I must share the lesson I learned from this story. You see, Dominic’s father knew that anytime you go out in the woods there is a risk, so he gave some simple instructions to his son, just in case he lost his way.

Before Dominic and his father started their day of skiing, the father had told his son that if ever he got lost he should find a large tree, and at its base cover himself with branches. And most importantly, stay there and do not move.

That day when Dominic discovered he had been separated from his father and he was lost, he trusted the words of his father. He skied towards a large tree until he could no longer move through the snow. He ditched his skis and walked to the largest tree in the area. He dug down into the snow to the base, and covered himself with braches. And he sat there and waited. As the night settled in and the cold pressed into him, he kept trusting the words of his father,

believing they would keep him safe. He knew his father was loving and wise so what he said Dominic trusted. ¹

What if Dominic had decided to try and manage on his own, to do things his way? Do you think a nine-year-old boy would have had much of a chance? I doubt it. But he trusted the words of his father and they were the difference between life and death for him.

And here is where the Spirit made the application for me. We have a Heavenly Father who has also given us instructions on how to live in a hostile and dangerous world. Our Heavenly Father is loving and wise and his instructions will give us life. But so many do not want to hear, or follow the words of our Father. And that is the situation described in the passage we read today.

Jesus has fed the multitude until all were satisfied, using only five small loaves and two small fish. The people are thrilled – they loved the free meal. They were ready to make Jesus a king, so Jesus withdrew from the people. This was not how he would be crowned as king: as a miracle-working provider.

Then the disciples got in trouble out on the lake and Jesus came to their rescue. By now the disciples should have got the message – they could not survive without Jesus.

The crowd gathers again so Jesus teaches them about what it means to be a true Christian. It is about putting your faith in Jesus, and following him. It is about finding your purpose and meaning in life through your relationship with him, not the things the world has to offer you. It is about “eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood.” (vss. 53-59) This is not literal, but points us to the cross and the faith to believe Jesus died to bear our sins in his flesh. By faith we acknowledge our sin - knowing he died for us - asking his forgiveness and committing ourselves to walk with him as his disciple. It is far more than saying a simple prayer – but that is the start of the journey. It is a prayer that must be said by faith with a commitment to stop living for ourselves and start living for Jesus.

That is where our passage picks up, and notice how people respond to this call to believe that Jesus came from heaven to be our Saviour: they say this is too hard. They simply want healing and free bread. They are not ready to follow Jesus to a cross.

Jesus knows the people are upset. As one writer put it, they were ready to “unfriend” Jesus from their Facebook account. They did not want to be associated with this crazy man. It may be hard to get a job, or more friends, if they are followers of Jesus. No, it was time stop following him and “unfriend” him. ²

¹ Luis Palau, Changed by Faith (Tyndale Publishing House, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2011), 87-90.

² Rick Gillespie-Mobley, “What’s Wrong With Jesus?” <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/what-39-s-wrong-with-jesus-rick-gillespie-mobley-sermon-on-commitment-237184?page=5&wc=800>

It was in the midst of this murmuring and unrest that Jesus says these wonderful words: “The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and of life.”(v. 63)

People are always seeking “life.” When COVID hit and we were instructed to isolate ourselves until we knew more about the virus, people listened and started out being very careful. The streets were empty, and most of the stores were closed. Parks and playgrounds were off limits and travel outside of one’s city or town was forbidden. People visited by phone calls or maybe a wave at someone through the windows of their home. Schools were closed and church services went online. And the virus stopped spreading...

But as time passed, people started to get tired of being isolated, so they donned their masks and started shopping again. Many went back to work, and parks were opened again. But still there were those who were not satisfied. They were not really living, or so they said. So they started to gather at bars and pubs and people’s houses for parties, complete with drugs and alcohol. Now they were living, they said. But soon their friends were being taken to the hospital, infected with the disease. Some would end up incubated, a terrible way to recover. But this was their definition of living – doing whatever they wanted no matter who it harmed.

Jesus says, that is the way of the flesh – and it counts for nothing.

It appears that one of the consequences of the Fall – one of the effects handed down to us after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit – was that people have a hard time submitting to God. In fact, submission to any authority seems to be a challenge for people today, and today many cities in the United States are a mess as people take the law into their own hands.

But Jesus is warning us that when we live for the flesh, when we choose to let our desires and appetites dictate how we will live, how we will spend our time, energy and resources, we will be living for that which counts for nothing. Do not get me wrong, some people without God will do good things for others, which is commendable, but even those good deeds will soon pass away. Jesus wants to offer us something that brings Spirit and life into our lives: His words.

Our verse this month is that familiar verse from Psalm 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.” This speaks about a commitment to take God serious, to hear and obey the words of God so that the person might live right. It is about submitting ourselves to the teachings of Jesus so that we can truly live.

Louis Palau tells of how his mother came to know Christ as personal Saviour. Her husband was a successful businessman, but he had nothing to do with God. One day he met a man named Edward Charles Rogers, a successful businessman working for a major oil company. Each night Mr. Rogers and his wife would go from house to house sharing the Gospel to their neighbours, and handing out Bibles. Louis’ mother took that Bible and began to read. She read in Matthew 5:8 that “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” and in John 1:29 “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” That was all she needed and she committed her

life to following Jesus. No gimmicks, No promises of getting rich. Just the Gospel truth that we are all sinners who need a Saviour, and Jesus is that Saviour. Her life was changed because she discovered the words of Jesus, filled with Spirit and life.³

How many times has this happened, that someone has read the Scriptures and their lives were transformed? Maybe some of you listening today can testify to the fact that when you read the Word of God, or heard it preached or taught, the Spirit of God worked within you and drew you to Jesus. There, as you committed your life to following Jesus, you discovered life.

Jesus offered spiritual life that day – and to us today as well – if only we will heed his words. But listen to the sad commentary in our passage: “Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” (vs. 64)

Jesus knows the hearts of all of us, and he searches the deep things of our hearts. He knows when we are simply going through the motions and when we truly are committed to following Jesus by hearing and obeying his words. He knows those who will submit to him, and those who want to set their own agenda, call their own shots.

We are told in verse 64 that Jesus knew who were truly believing and following him, and who were just playing the game. He knew all about what was going on in Judas Iscariot’s heart, the man who would betray our Lord and sell him out to his enemies. Judas would never truly submit to the words of Jesus and he never discovered the life Jesus was offering him.

But Judas stayed with the fellowship of the disciples. He continued to go through the motions of being a believer – like many people who attend church. They go through the motions but their hearts are not right with God. They are not willing to listen to the Words of Jesus, submitting themselves to follow him. They are still in control of their lives, and they know nothing of the Spirit and life Jesus was speaking about that day.

And there were many others who simply walked away from Jesus. Verse 66 says that “many of his disciples turned their back and no longer followed him.” I find it interesting that the verse that describes the apostasy of Christ’s followers is 666 – chapter 6, verse 66. The number of the beast who will lead many people away from Jesus in the end times is 666 (Rev. 13:18). Of course the original Greek texts of the New Testament did not have verses and chapters – that was added much later – but I find it interesting that we would have a description of apostasy – or falling away from Jesus – at 666.

Jesus turns to the disciples, the twelve he called to follow him, and asked if they too wanted to walk away – unfriend him. This is where the Apostle Peter shines – no doubt because he speaks under inspiration of the Holy Spirit – as he says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (vss. 68-69)

³ Palau, p. 38.

Peter gets it right – Jesus alone brings us the words that lead to eternal life. We need to hear, and obey his words, following what he says if we are to discover the eternal life Jesus offers us.

Today, if we call ourselves a follower of Jesus – a Christian – then we must know his Word to us. Where will we find that? Though he can speak to us directly by the Holy Spirit, the way Jesus usually speaks to His people is through the written word – the scriptures.

Your Bible is not merely a collection of writings made by men. Neither is it a propaganda product of the church. True, God worked through men to write the scriptures and true he worked through the church to preserve the scriptures, but “all scripture is God breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). What you have in your Bible is what God inspired and sent to us so that we might know his word to us – a word that is Spirit and life.

A follower of Jesus – a Christian – will not allow his Bible to sit unused on the shelf. Daily a Christian will read, study, and apply the word of God in his or her life. Our world desperately seeks for a way to truly live, and we hold the answer in our hands: the scriptures. They were given to us by a wise and loving Father who wants to keep us safe in this dangerous world. He wants us to live – now and for eternity. So he has given us his Word.

We tend to find time for our favourite TV program, the hockey game, to view our Facebook posts, but do we find time to read and study the Bible? We are busy caring for our yards, our homes, our cars but what about our souls? We say we are followers of Jesus, but do we really know what he said?

This morning Jesus challenges not only the people of His day to be people of the Word, but us as well. May we be people who hear and follow the words of Jesus, knowing they are spirit and life. May we humbly submit ourselves to following what He says to us in His Word.

Bonnie had a promising start to life – education, solid family, good connections – but it all started to fall apart for her and by the time she was 21 years of age she was homeless, living in her car, and without hope. It was then that she found an old new testament someone gave her and she started to read it. Though she attended church as a young girl she never heard the Gospel story. As she read the words that are spirit and life, she understood for the first time that she was a sinner and that Jesus died to save her. She remembered the words of a friend who said, “You must be born again” and that night alone in her car with her Bible and God she made the choice to follow Jesus. Her life was forever changed.

And that can happen to you as well. Turn to Jesus, and read His Word to you. Commit yourself to trusting and obeying him. You will be glad you did.