



Hear the Word

from Pastor Paul E. Hoffman

Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 26, 2018

John 6:56-69

Pearl Jam returned to Seattle this month. Two shows at Safeco Field for sell-out crowds, a few more than 90,000 people. *Northwest Music Scene* reported: "The positive energy was everywhere as eager fans milled about and waited in lines in near-sweltering heat, getting ready for one of the most anticipated Seattle shows in recent memory." It was a great act of civic generosity for Pearl Jam to do these concerts as a benefit for the homeless of Seattle. In two evenings, over \$11 million was raised to give at least a few of our neighbors who have fallen on rough times the simple dignity of a roof over their heads.

But I have to tell you. I'm offended. Offended not because of what Pearl Jam did. I think it's wonderful. Offended not because 160 businesses got on board and joined in the fund-raising. Here's why I'm offended.

A *Real Change* newspaper salesman – likely a homeless person himself – reported that on the two nights of the concerts he stood on the corner outside Safeco Field for hours, trying to sell papers. \$2 bucks each. And for two nights, as 90,000+ people passed by on their way to the concert, not one person bought a paper from him. Not one.

As chapter six of the Gospel of John comes to an end, the disciples – shaking their heads and kicking the dust around with their sandals – 'fess up to Jesus. *All this stuff about eating your flesh and drinking your blood, man... This teaching is difficult. Who can accept it?*

Ever the Wise One, ever the teacher, ever the Compassionate Savior, Jesus doesn't defend his teaching. He doesn't go on to say anything more convincing or more profound. He simply asks: *Does this offend you? If so, walk away. Seriously. Walk away.*

There's no way to substantiate the *Real Change* newspaper seller's Safeco Field Pearl Jam concert story. But it doesn't matter. The damage is already done. I'm offended. And I'm not offended at the people who passed him by. I'm certainly not offended at Pearl Jam. I'm offended by the news paper guy. Because he has exposed me. By his story he has laid me bare in front of God and everyone. In a 30-second news story, he has put square in front of me my own self-centeredness and hypocrisy. I wasn't at the Pearl Jam concerts. I didn't need to be. I pass this man's exact likeness five or six times every week at my own neighborhood QFC. *Real Change*, sir? No thanks. I'm good. I'm good. What a lie.

Does this offend you? Yes. I'm offended. I don't like to be found out. I bet you don't, either.

But here's the thing. Every one of us has priors of one kind or another. Not one of us stands righteous before God on our own. We have all been found out. I'm good. No, you're not. Even Peter gets it. Even headstrong, impetuous Peter is smart enough to say, *No, we're not going away. Where would we go, Jesus? Only you have the words of eternal life.*

And even though Jesus' is a hard teaching, it is a teaching that saves. It is a teaching that brings us freedom and life. It is a teaching that just might – just might – lead us back to our humanity.

Because the teaching of Jesus so fully captured and offensively laid out in this 6th chapter of John is that the Bread of Life is for everyone. And it covers all our priors. It is for the homeless as well as the millionaire musical benefactor. It is for the *Real Change* seller and the 90,000+ who pass him by. God loves a cheerful giver and the tight-fisted miser. God loves Democrats and Republicans, even Independents. Those who vote and those who don't. The Bread of Life is for the demurring grandma in the wheel chair in line at the airport and the loud, pushy business traveler with three carry-ons. God loves me. And God loves you. Just the same. And – you've got to admit – most days, that is more than a little bit offensive. But there it is.

Oh, Calvin. Little Calvin. Look what we have gotten you into? Welcome to this big baptismal pond of saints and sinners. Of the generous and the miserly. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Welcome to the waters. At times they are offensive. At times they overwhelm. But they are always, in the end – always – liberating and life-giving.

And all around the water's edge, there is laid out for all of us

the offensive,

the challenging,

the life-giving Bread of Life.

In the name of the Father, and of the (✠) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.