

Proper 14B “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” John 6.44

Our Gospel lesson from John follows immediately upon the Gospel from last week. Jesus had miraculously fed the 5000 men with their wives and children from five loaves and two fish. Then, seeing that they were about to take him by force and make him their king, Jesus and his disciples got in a boat and escaped the crowds and their Messianic fervor. Jesus had no desire to be placed at the head of an armed rebellion against the rulers of his day. So they sought him out further up the shore of the Sea of Galilee and wondered why it was that he would not become their king. Was he not the Messiah?

This was the hope of the Jews of Jesus’ day. For 500 years they had awaited the coming of the one who would finally fulfill all the promises that God had made to them through the prophets. When the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, came the Messiah would reign as king of the Jews. They would finally be freed from pagan rule and oppression. As a mark of his rule and the sign of God’s pleasure the Messiah would rebuild the Temple. The glory of the Lord would

finally be restored in their midst: Immanuel, God with us. Some Jews even believed that it would be at this time, when the kingdom was restored to Israel, that the righteous dead, the faithful Jews of ages past, would be raised to life. Death would be defeated. Pain and sorrow would be no more. The Messiah would do these things and the Jews would rejoice when they saw him.

And this is the underlying problem of this passage, and indeed, Jesus' entire earthly ministry. In the first chapter of John's Gospel he wrote, "The Messiah came to his own and his own received him not." The Jews were looking for the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah. The Jews should have seen Jesus to be the Messiah. Yet they did not. Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life... But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." They had seen Jesus. They had seen his miraculous power displayed upon the mountain side. They had been filled with heavenly food. Yet they did not believe. Neither his mighty works convinced them nor the words that he had spoken. How could this be? Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the

Father who sent me draws him.” There is nothing that can overcome the natural, broken condition of the human will unless the grace of the Father draws him.

So let us first consider this matter that was so difficult for Jesus’ audience. We must come to Jesus. I hope that this question is not too basic for you all today. Occasionally people remind me that I should make my themes simpler in my sermons. So here we have it this morning. What does it mean to come to Jesus? And he tells us in his own words, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” To come to Jesus means to believe in Jesus. The Jews had come to Jesus, in their bodies, and had had their fill of the bread and the fishes, but they had not come to Jesus in their hearts and souls and so they remained empty and without eternal life. They had come to a place but had not come to belief. They were as far from Jesus, and the truth of his being, as they had been before they set out on their journey into the countryside. Coming to Jesus entails desiring to gain from him the benefits of his person and his power as the Son of God. For Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “God made Christ Jesus our wisdom, our

righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” We wouldn’t go to a grocery store for a hair cut or to the police station to buy a new suit of clothes. No each serves the needs of its customers who desire to have what each provides: either goods or services. If we would be wise we must come to Jesus. If we would be God’s friends and be remade in holiness we must come to Jesus. If we would be freed from the slavery and bondage of our sins, our addictions, our hatreds and prejudices we must come to Jesus. He must be the object of our affections our needs and our aspirations.

But, Jesus says that no one can come to him unless the Father draws him. What can this mean? Is it like gravity? Or is the motion of the Father more violent and personal? It certainly can be. The great Anglican writer, CS Lewis was a confirmed atheist and enemy of the Christian faith. Lewis wrote in one of his many books that, “God dragged him kicking and screaming into faith in Christ.” But most often it is not so. Instead, it is more like the enticements of courtship. While it may be true that the quickest way to a man’s heart is through his stomach, the way to a woman’s heart is much more treacherous and winding. Once a man has set his affections upon a woman he

must draw her along with kind words and attentions and perhaps even small gifts as testimonies of his love for her. If he came to her and demanded that she love him, it is most often the case that she will resist, even rejecting him as heartless and rude. But if he cherishes her and wins her heart, then he will draw her to himself.

In this same way the Father draws those whom he loves to come to the Son. He gives them expressions of his love. He shows them the beauty of his Son Jesus. He melts the cold heart within them so that it warms to view of Christ hanging upon the cross. For as Paul said, “He loved me and gave himself up for me.” The Father pursues with the gift of the Holy Ghost and entices with the hope of heaven. This world and its sufferings are without compare to the glory that is to be revealed in the resurrection. This is the way the Father bids each one come to him, and they cannot resist the goodness of his mercy and grace. Yet we must say with Jesus, that without these testimonies and this gracious calling, no one can come to Jesus.

How can this be? No one can come to Jesus because no one wills to come to Jesus. The natural human being is unwilling to come to

Jesus. Think with me for a moment what coming to Jesus means. It means that he has something that you don't have. It means that you are in need of assistance because of some shortcoming on your part. How easily do you come to asking a neighbor's forgiveness? It is embarrassing that you are in the wrong and they are in the right. Likewise, coming to Jesus means that we admit that we cannot depend on ourselves any longer. We realize that what we thought was wisdom and strength and goodness has turned out to be foolishness and what is left of a lifetime of good intentions. Coming to Christ means that we have thrown all our care upon him the way that an infant does with its mother. Finally, coming to Christ means that we have to leave behind our former companions. All of the habits, behaviors, associations and lifestyles of the former life must be cast off and we must come to Christ and follow him alone. No natural human being comes to Jesus on their own, because there is too much of the old life that appeals and too much of the new one that repels.

But there is more! The Father must draw us to come to Christ because we are unable to come to him. It is like the story the old preacher used to tell about the ice cream salesman who was looking to expand his

business. And he wondered where there might large groups of people with time on their hands that might like some of his cool treats. Why, he thought, I'll try the city morgue. So he pushed his cart down the aisles crying, "Ice cream! Free ice cream! Anyone can have ice cream that will come and get it!" How many do you think he gave away? None. Why? Because his clientele was unable to take advantage of his otherwise delicious and free offer. We are dead in our trespasses and sins! It is not as though humans are ambivalent about God. No, Paul says that we were angry with God! To the Romans he wrote, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." To the Ephesians he wrote, "We all once walked according to the passions of our flesh, and so we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind." Jesus said to his disciples that without him they could do nothing. And again, Jesus said to the Pharisees who accused him, "How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." What is the conclusion of the Holy Scriptures about our condition without the Father drawing us to Jesus Christ? It is that we are like dead stones lying upon the ground with no power to remove ourselves out of the way.

What then is here for each of us, friends? We may see the reactions described plainly in John's gospel. For some this message is foolishness and they quickly move on to something that is more entertaining or profitable. For them the cares and attractions of this world are all that interest them. They give no thought to the resurrection or to the life that is to come. Theirs is a life that is lived for the moment and for a world that is passing away.

Then there are those that are embarrassed by Jesus and his claim upon the whole world. Instead, they wish that he were more open-minded to the realities of the modern era. They wish to be able to make their own way, their own truth, and their own life if only they could do it on their own terms and in their own power. But it cannot be so for such a one as this. For only the penitent and humble can see Jesus and believe in him.

Finally, there are the weak and the destitute, and oh that we were all together with them! For it is the contrite sinner who shall have his sins forgiven. It is the Father who is strong. It is the Father who calls. And we can be sure that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

We can be sure that if he calls us to his Son that we can be confident that he is ours. Through him we have access to all the joys of redemption, the forgiveness of sin, adoption as son, and if sons then heirs to all the glories of the New Creation with Christ himself.