

Aug 23 Natural Rejection John 6:56-69 (remind them of can foods to GUM)

It's Charles Darwin's 200th birthday year. Darwin proposed theories about natural selection, *the process by which genetic traits that help an organism survive become more common over generations*. This adaptive evolution is not just a theory, but an observable phenomenon.

In today's text, we see something akin to natural rejection, the process by which the human mind cannot accept what does not fit into its prescribed boundaries.

A reporter asked **Yogi Berra**, "**have you made up your mind yet?**" to which **Yogi replied, I don't think so**. But some intriguing and impressive research indicates that we all have made up our minds, whether we intend to or not.

I read an article by a female psychologist who was commenting on her immediate attraction to a man she saw across the parking lot in the building where she worked. She would see him quite often from a distance, but could tell he was tanned, handsome and strong. After having a close encounter with him in the elevator, the attractors in her brain were off the charts.

When she finally encountered him alone, she introduced herself and reached out to shake his hand. He reached out with his left hand to take hers. It was then she saw the prosthesis right hand. Reflecting on the event, she was shocked and filled with guilt that her attractors turned off immediately upon the sight of the missing limb. It was not a conscious choice. In fact, the change she felt was revolting in her mind.

We all experience these instant feelings that something is right or not right. And we suppose that these instincts or gut reactions are based upon our vast experience and wisdom. With all due respect to **Malcolm Gladwell** and his book [Blink](#), our instant assessments likely originate in the most unconscious, animalistic parts of our brains.

It's really no surprise that the same people who were attracted to Jesus because he fed them and healed them, turned on a dime because of something Jesus said. *The kingdom of God is at hand; it is upon you. Wow, this Jesus is a great prophet. In every town and village he healed the sick and cast out demons. You know, this Jesus could be the Messiah. Come unto me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Jesus is so powerful and merciful, he must be the son of God.*

You must eat my body and drink my blood. That's the craziest thing I ever heard. This guy's out of his mind.

A natural attraction changed to a natural rejection. The throngs that had following Jesus, in a Malcolm Gladwell blink of reaction, decided that Jesus wasn't a prophet after all. And many who had followed him turned away, our text tells us.

Immediately, the 24 hour news commentators started weighing in. ***Jesus of Nazareth, who has enjoyed phenomenal approval ratings, took a dive today. Never has a religious leader gone from such heights to such depths in a day.***

Here at HLNN (Holy Land News Network) we're calling it the GAFF FROM GALILEE; the usually articulate Jesus of Nazareth said, and I quote, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me..." Isaac, what in the world was Jesus thinking? This may be the gaff of the century, a precursor to most American politicians. If the numbers are any indication Joshua, it may be the end of his campaign.

Conventional wisdom in good communication is that you attempt to say things in a way that helps your audience understand. If you have a difficult message about the economy or healthcare, for instance, you want to say it in a way that doesn't frighten people or make them think it's a bad idea. When you're speaking to voters, you want to make sure they hear what they want to hear. When you're trying to win friends and influence people, in other words, you don't present a really mysterious spiritual truth so bluntly.

Jesus could have carefully and slowly explained his sacrificial death and our spiritual participation in communion with him. He could have spoon fed the crowd, but he didn't. And this is a challenge and a rebuke to every preacher and teacher of the NT. Don't try to tenderize the meat of the gospel because it requires a lot of chewing!

Jesus gets around to saying what he means. **In v. 63** he says that his words are *spirit and life*, not to be understood in a materially literal way.

But was it really Jesus' method of speaking that turned off the crowd? Or was it their natural rejection instinct when faced with something that just didn't seem right.

Sadly, the living spiritual reality of communion; of sharing in the body and blood of Christ, has continued to be a source of confusion, division and rejection.

Some Christian groups believe that the sacrifice of Jesus is recreated on the altar and the bread and wine, at the blessing of a priest, literally becomes the flesh and blood of Jesus. Others assert that the substance of Christ's body and blood is present in the bread and wine. Others believe that Christ is uniquely and sacramentally present in the Lord's Supper. Baptists, for the most part, have affirmed that the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ. And our ancestors have used this text to support their view.

v. 63...*It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* The longer I live, the less interested I am about debating what happens when we come to the Lord's Table. We take bread and cup in remembrance and believe that Jesus is uniquely present and powerful when we do so. I don't need to know how.

But the crowd followed their instincts and abandoned the Son of God. The law of natural rejection was at work. And that brings us to **today's question**. ***Where do our instincts take us? Can we trust our sense of knowing what's right more than we trust Jesus...*** which is what happened in this story?

What do your instincts tell you when Jesus says ***love your enemies***; that you would refuse to retaliate; that you would treat your enemies with mercy they deny to you? What does your gut tell you? Mine says that's the fast lane to being walked over or destroyed. My natural rejection instinct takes me away from the one I call Lord.

When Jesus told the Pharisees that they should *keep tithing*, but should be humble and merciful toward those who don't keep all the rules, what is your instinct? Do you think, *there's no way I can pay all these taxes and expenses and give God 10%. It's just not possible.* Don't our natural instincts to keep or spend take us away from trusting God?

When Jesus says "love the least of these my brethren" do our instincts tell us that those people won't help pay the bills around here...that we need to be going after well-educated and affluent people? Do we have this visceral reaction about people not doing enough to take care of themselves; or milking the system because they are lazy? These are natural rejections.

Our culture seems to have powerful natural instincts urging us to get away, to escape, to numb the pain and struggles of this life rather than to abide, to stay, to remain in Christ. We are

a culture that escapes with drugs with sex with TV with gossip with food with video games or anything else that takes us away. And Jesus waits to see if we will remain with him, or leave like so many.

Imagine a guy from Texas who drives a beat up pick up, wears cowboy boots and goes by the name of Buck, and you would probably have a good idea about Richard, “Buck” Buchanan, a member of the first church I served. Buck was the guy who volunteered to help with our youth fellowship at Halloween because we were going to have a haunted trail through the woods. Buck offered to take the chain off his saw and come after each group as they were exiting the woods. Right up his alley.

Buck had been hit hard, high and low by life. His marriage had failed; his job had been lost more than once; he didn’t finish his high school education; he had a bad knee from football; he drank too much beer; and his language was salty, but not salt of the earth salty.

Buck often doubted his salvation because as he said it, *them cuss words just come out whether I want ‘em to or not*. And he was still prone to all his other redneck ways. But his heart was so sensitive and he would do anything for you if you asked. So I would tell him that old habits are hard to break and that there was no way Jesus was going to let him go.

But he kept having his doubts and I grew weary of assuring him, so one day out of frustration rather than wisdom, I said to him, Buck, if living like a Christian is so hard, why don’t you just forget about it. I didn’t know if he was going to whip me or start crying, but looking me dead in the eye he said, **“because Jesus is all I got.”** *Well if you’re not going to give up on Jesus, he certainly isn’t going to give up on you.*

Which is something like what happened in this story. Jesus asks the 12 if they are going to abandon him like the rest, and they say, in essence, where would we go? We’ve seen what the world offers. You’re the only one who has the words of life. Or as Buck would say, “you’re all we’ve got.”

If you think about it, it’s not a resounding affirmation, like “we’re really fired up about our mission” or “this gospel stuff is real prosperity.” All those disciples could affirm is that Jesus was all they had. And considering how many other instincts we have, that seems to be all the faith Jesus needs for us to have.