

## Lent Devotional April 5, 2019

### SCRIPTURE

#### John 6:52-59

<sup>52</sup>The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup>So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; <sup>55</sup>for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever." <sup>59</sup>He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

### DEVOTIONAL

#### **The Rev. Joshua Fisher, Church Planting and Revitalization Certificate '18 (and M.Div. '14) / Pastor, Homestead United Presbyterian and Lincoln Place Presbyterian Churches, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

I wonder why the author of this Gospel added, "He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum?" It seems like an obscure detail after such a confrontational teaching of Jesus—a teaching that leaves many confused, furious, or a little bit (or a whole lot) of both. And this incident doesn't mark the first time that Capernaum became a conflicted arena of hurt and rejection for Jesus. We read in the other Gospels that Jesus experienced significant rejection in Capernaum, and he has something to say about it: "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades" (Luke 10:15; Matt. 11:23). Capernaum seems to be a place in Jesus' life where he is simply misunderstood. And in each encounter, Jesus judges the city's rejection of him as a rejection of the Father—a rejection of God and God's Kingdom.

In the season of Lent, we are invited once again to allow the Holy Spirit to enter the Capernaums of our own hearts—the memories, hurts, or places of fear we simply refuse to let Jesus be. They are familiar places to many of us. They're the parts of our lives we hold on to tightly because they matter so dearly to us. Perhaps it is the Capernaums of our hearts that Jesus comes to with the invitation to partake of his life.

Which is precisely why the Church needs to participate in the Eucharistic celebration, to share in the blood and flesh of Christ. For every time we celebrate this meal, we open our hands and hearts before the Son of Man. We open our hands to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We open our hands as an embodied action that life is a gift, given at the expense of the flesh and blood of Christ. In this bread, in this cup, life is found. Many of us approach this table of love with what we cannot let go of; yet something happens to us when we open our hands to receive the bread and cup. It is hard to hang on to something and at the same time open one's hands. In this season of Lent, may we be honest about our Capernaums and allow Christ to be with us there, even if it is uncomfortable and contentious. For whoever eats this bread will live forever.

### PRAYER

Loving God, you are the One who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one lost sheep. Please come again to the Capernaums of our hearts and our world. May we be reminded in this season of Lent that You not only come seeking your sheep, but You also lay down Your life for Your sheep. May the Holy Spirit give us the courage to trust You in the places we do not trust letting go of so that we may know your abundant life, to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.