

Psalm 34:15-22  
John 6:60-71

**Running Away**  
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Two of its most popular songs were: “Gonna Climb a Mountain” and “What Kind of Fool Am I?” (1962). Do any of you remember the name of the musical? (Two did!) – Stop the World I Want to Get Off.

In 1993 William D. Hendricks wrote a book, Exit Interviews. It is filled with interviews of people who had decided to leave the church. He writes, “...they found themselves in the gap between the ideals of the New Testament and the realities of actual groups of Christians.” In other words they discovered that many Christian groups are not living up to the Christ they found in the New Testament. It is a dangerous thing to put the words of Christ in the hands of the people. Especially when much of what we call Christianity is culture.

In the spring of 2007 two students in a class on Culture and Christianity at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena chose to set up a web-site as their class project. It was a web-site dedicated to those who had for various reasons left the church. It immediately began to draw responses from all over the world and is still up and running today: [www.lettersfromleavers.com](http://www.lettersfromleavers.com). As one reads through many of the letters posted on this site one soon discovers that people have left the church but not the faith. Why do people hang on to the faith but decide the church is not for them? (Both students received A's for the course.)

We may think that this is something new – but then we read John's Gospel and discover this is something that even Jesus encountered: People running away from the realities of who Jesus is. They could not comprehend his call on their lives.

What would make you run away? Have you ever wanted to run away? Well, at least after you were older than six or seven. I remember the story of a mother finding her young son packing a suitcase. She asked him if he was running away and he said, “No.”

“Then what are you packing a suit case for?” She asked.

He replied, “I'm packing YOUR suitcase. I'm not allowed to cross the street!”

The pressures build, the problems come faster and faster and the solutions do not seem to come. We want it all and we want it right now. We long for the easy fix, the simple solution. It is interesting to note that in tough economic times the sales of lottery tickets increase. We are looking for solutions and they never seem to come. Maybe if we ran away and started over things would be different.

They have followed Jesus. Yesterday there were fed. It was a miracle. They longed for the day when manna would again fall from the heavens. They had followed Jesus hoping for another day of free food and he makes what they determine to be “hard sayings.” They were looking for the easy fix and simple solutions and they cannot understand nor comprehend the words of Jesus. If Moses could provide daily manna...

What are his words that are so hard to understand? “I am the bread of life.” He uses the same word that God used when he called Moses in the wilderness. Remember Moses needed a name. He had to tell the Israelites what the name of their God was. God responds to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM*” (Ex.3:14). It is this phrase that Jesus uses: God's I AM. This is not the easy fix they were expecting. Jesus confronts them with a lifestyle when they are looking for daily bread. Jesus asks for them to believe he is the one who confronted Moses at the burning bush. Jesus asks them to believe that he is one who will fulfill the prophecy of the prophets. These are hard words and when they discover they will not get another free meal they leave. They are disappointed. They run looking for another who may be able to meet their immediate needs.

Jesus turns and asks an appropriate question of the disciples, “*Do you wish to go away also?*” (6:67). Or, “Why are you still here?” Everyone else is leaving. Why are you still here? He began yesterday with over 5,000 and today he addresses the Twelve. There must be a reason why they are still there. For once Peter gets it right. We are here because, “*You have the words*

*of eternal life” (6:68). We would leave but where could we go? Running away would not help us. We have put our faith in you and your message and we will stay.*

I think the NRSV captures Peter’s growth process better than some of the other translations. It reads, “*We have come to believe...*” (6:69). Peter’s phrase indicates to me that his belief has been a process. It was not a flash of lightning from the sky decision. It has been growing in him and the other disciples as they have spent time with Jesus. They have watched how he interacted with the people. They have heard his words and listened to his teachings. They have heard the parables. They have been growing in their faith. What may have been an excitement at the beginning has turned into a strong foundation of faith and hope. This is not some light statement that Peter is making. It comes from the very depths of his heart. This is the decision that most of them have made. “*You have the words of eternal life.*” There is nowhere else to run.

Now I wonder, what would have happened if some of those who had left had stayed for a while longer? Would they have changed their minds as they discovered more about Jesus? Would they have discovered what Peter and the other disciples had discovered? Would they have found what they were looking for? If they had just stayed with Jesus a few more hours, a few more days would they have made a different decision? Would they have not run away?

Running away is seldom a good solution. Yes, there are days when it may look good. I remember hearing a fellow pastor say that he had resigned (run away) from the ministry at least a thousand times. He added this was usually done late on Sunday night or early on Monday morning and by Tuesday he had come to his senses. Yes, there are days when running away may look good. The cave that many of the mystics retreated to may look like a good option some days. But running away seldom solves our problems.

Peter has it right. We have no place else to run. Jesus is the answer. The trouble is we want the quick fix, the daily manna and Jesus is calling us to a lifestyle. People are leaving the Church but not the faith. They see a disconnect between the words of Jesus being lived out in the Gospels and the way the Church often conducts itself. They long for family, community, fellowship and hope and find fights, power struggles and arbitrary rules for living. They see people trying to tell them what to do, how to live. Did not Jesus say something about trying to remove a splinter from the eye of another when there’s a beam in our own eye? The problem with Jesus’ crowd is that they did not stay around long enough!

The Today Show this week interviewed a group of women who were concerned about other people who are now telling people how to parent, unsolicited. One woman told the story of her son having a three-year-old temper tantrum outside an apartment building. The doorman came up to her and asked her to move her son to the other side of the street as people in the building were complaining about her bad parenting.

Why do we want to mind other peoples’ business?

Why are you still here? The words of Jesus are difficult. The demands he makes on our lives are not easy. He asks that we take steps of faith. We may have to take the less popular road, the road less traveled. We may have to stand for those who cannot stand for themselves: the widows, the poor, the orphans, the down trodden – those without health care, etc. Remember the first deacons were called to distribute food and wait on tables. Their job was to make sure that everyone got what they needed. It was a tough job. But it was their job. Peter is right, “*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God*” (6:68b-69).

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
Hendricks, William, D., Exit Interviews, Moody Press, Chicago, 1993 (p. 29)