

“How Now, Chop Logic!”
(#5 in the “*Living in the Thin Places*” Epiphany series)

*Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said,
“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”
They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph,
whose father and mother we know?
HOW can he NOW say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”
(John 6:41-42)*

A sermon by Siegfried S. Johnson on the 6th Sunday after Epiphany, **February 17, 2019**
(Volume 02 Number 31)
Christ of the Hills UMC, 700 Balearic Drive, Hot Springs Village, Arkansas 71909

We’ve been *Living in the Thin Places* during Epiphany, a series focusing on the early chapters of John’s gospel which cast an incrementally intensifying light on Jesus as we march toward Epiphany’s pinnacle moment, the Transfiguration when Jesus’ face shines like the sun.

I’m describing those encountering Jesus as experiencing *Thin Places*, an ancient Celtic Christian term from Ireland describing places regarded as uniquely holy, as if the curtain separating earth and heaven is being pulled back, heaven shining through to earth.

Our path has brought us to the 6th chapter of John, the *Feeding of the Multitude*. Our focus is not on the miracle itself, but what happened the next day, Jesus making a claim provoking so much discomfort that there was a mini-exodus, his teaching sent some of his disciples packing so that “*they went back and walked with him no more.*”

The feeding of the multitude is a miracle recorded by all four gospel writers. John, though, elaborates as no other gospel writer. At 71 verses, this is his longest chapter. After the miracle he tells what happens the next day, when the crowds find him and he says, “*I am the bread of God come down from heaven to give life to the world.*”

The Jews complained, offering an obvious and logical argument. “*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? HOW can he NOW say, I have come down from heaven?*” *How . . . Now?*

This has been a Shakespearean kind-of-week for me. I went back and read parts of *Romeo and Juliet*. Let’s say I was in a Valentine’s Day mood. Reading Shakespeare alongside John 6 can be quite a revelation! When the Jews said, “*How Now can you say you have come from heaven,*” it was in sync with one of my favorite Shakespearean phrases from *Romeo and Juliet*. I’m using that phrase as my sermon title, “*How Now! Chop Logic!*” (*In the sanctuary offering of this message one of our own, he of the gifted voice,, Larry Venable, delivered this line throughout the message with Shakespearean elegance. Thanks Larry!*)

How Now! was an expression of surprise, ranging from the mild surprise of a common greeting, to disgusted disbelief. To greet someone with *How Now?* was the Elizabethan way of saying, “*What’s Up?*”

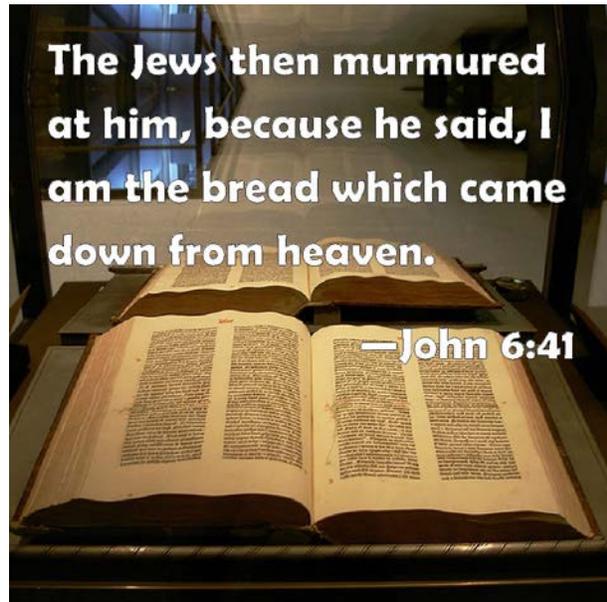
“*How Now?*” could also be used more emphatically when confronting what seemed like foolishness or stupidity. One might say *How Now!* as a way to say, “*What???* As we might say, “*Really? Are you kidding me?*”

Shakespeare used the phrase in *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, Scene 5. That’s the scene when Capulet confronts his 13 year old daughter, Juliet, after Lady Capulet reported Juliet’s emphatic unwillingness to go through with her arranged marriage to one she did not love at St. Peter’s Church a mere three days hence. No wonder, since she has fallen in love with Romeo of the despised Montagues. When Capulet is informed of this by Lady Capulet, he storms into his daughter chamber. Angered at her refusal, Capulet says to his daughter Juliet, “*How Now! How Now! Chop Logic!*”

Chop Logic means irrational thought. “*You’re not thinking straight! You’re logic is choppy! You don’t see the whole picture, Juliet! Leave it to your dad to think for you! You’ve chopped logic into bits and you’re not putting all the pieces together! I see the whole picture! I know my family and its needs!*”

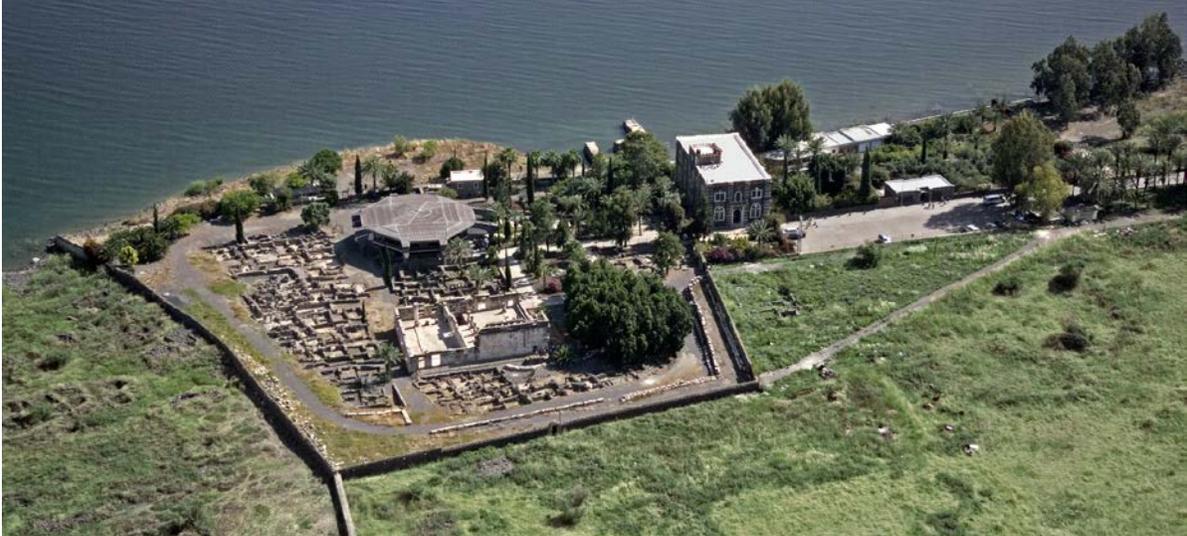
So there’s your Shakespearean twist as to what the Jews are saying to Jesus. “*We know your family! Are you not Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? ‘How Now do you say that you have come from heaven!’*” It’s as if the Jews were saying “*How Now! How Now! Chop Logic! What is this?*”

Now, at that point in the debate, the Jews divert the subject to manna in the wilderness, hoping their reference to Moses might humble Jesus into a retraction. It doesn’t. In fact, his claims become bolder. “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world, IS MY FLESH.*”



With those words the *Difficult-Saying Meter* rockets off the chart. Shocked, the people wonder, “*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*” Verse 59 marks the place where Jesus said this. It is at the synagogue in Capernaum that Jesus teaches, “*my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.*”

Surely one of the most inspirational spots in the Holy Land is Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, the home of Jesus for most of his ministry in the Galilee. In the aerial image you see the ruins of the excavated portion of the village. The large, dark octagonal roof is a church built over the house early Christians regarded as the home of St. Peter.



Here is a close-up image of the synagogue at Capernaum, the place where Jesus made this radical statement, *“My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”*

No wonder many would have reacted with, *“How Now! Chop Logic!”* Thinking him a magician or a lunatic, they turned away and walked with him no more. When Jesus



asked the twelve, *“Do you also wish to go away?”* Peter replied, *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

In Shakespearean spirit, I’ve written a monologue and will now play a role as if on stage:

Let me introduce myself to Christ of the Hills United Methodist Church. You know me, I think, because you read the Bible, and I am in the Bible. Well, not actually my name. Still, I’m there. My name is not important, but my story is. Will you hear it? You see, I was there in the Galilee. I saw the multitude fed by

Jesus, even ate some of the bread myself, but not the fish. No, not the fish. I prefer pizza to fish. Well, you call it pizza, we call it pita, but it's the same word. Don't doubt me. I know my etymology. Pizza, Pita – it's all the same.

But this day wasn't the same. No, it was not the same at all, not the same as any other day. This day Jesus declared himself to be the Bread of Heaven.

Now, let me tell you, I know bread. I was a baker. I know where it comes from and I can tell you this, it's not from heaven. Bread comes from the grain of the earth. I was born in Magdala, only a couple of miles along the shoreline from where Jesus fed us with a few loaves and fishes. I hear some of you will be going to my home next month – Magdala – which has been unearthed only in the last few years. You will see much there, at my home. Why, you may even walk right over the floor of my first bakery. If you had been there 2000 years ago I would have sold you a bagel with the best cream cheese, a Jewish delight.

I say my first bakery, because I expanded to a second bakery. Quite the entrepreneur, was. You would call it a franchise. I was one of the first Jews who moved south about six miles to the brand new city Herod built called Tiberias, in honor of Caesar Tiberius. A businessman need go where the people are, right? That's still where the people are, by the way, Tiberias. It's even where your hotel will be, very close to my thriving bakery. It flourished there with the mostly Roman population growing throughout my life. You might say I was the local Starbucks.

Well, we all heard about Jesus, the rumors that he was making well some who were sick, and I don't mean with a mild cold. I mean sick. Crippled and even blind. Some thought him a trickster, a magician. So I arranged for help in my bakery and went with some of my fishermen friends in their boat from Tiberias to find Jesus, a boat just as some of you will be in next month. The miracle we witnessed, Jesus feeding the crowds with only a few loaves and fishes, was so incredible that we decided not to go back to Tiberias that night, but to stay. With my village of Magdala so close, it was nothing to spend the night there.

We looked for him the next day. Perhaps there would be an encore, we imagined, still stunned by what we had experienced the day before. We found him in Capernaum, and we listened intently to every word he spoke. But his sayings were hard. Many were there from Nazareth, which is barely twenty miles away. Some had known him as a child. I had not, though my older brother had run across his little brother once, the son of Mary and Joseph. At least, so he told me.

Even that knowledge of his family, meager though it was, was enough for me. So I accepted not-so-whispered logic spreading among the crowds that this man had to be a bit off, saying crazy things about himself, that he was bread from heaven. Had he come from heaven, we wondered?

Heavens No! We knew he hailed from Nazareth. Who did he think he was fooling? So we said, "*How Now can he say he came down from heaven.*" It was *Chop Logic*, pure and simple!

Why, it was almost as though Jesus was saying that he was God himself, a repugnant idea to any Jew. Then, when he said we needed to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Well, I'm sorry! Not going there! You can see that, surely? The thought violates every idea sacred to me as a Jewish person.

So we went back home, ending our Messiah-quest road trip. You should have seen the people turning to leave, the boats filling the sea on the way back to Tiberius, a scene like the end of one of your 4th of July fireworks on Lake Balboa, the fun over, now venturing back into the safety of their backyard slips.

But, as I was walking toward the boat I heard him say to Peter, "*Will you, too, go?*" And I heard Peter, brave man, and as loud as he was brave say, "*Where can we go? We believe that you are the Son of God!*" Not me. We liked Jesus, we really did. But eating his flesh and drinking his blood? No, I just can't wrap my mind around that. Neither could my friends. So we left.

Oh, and by the way, I said earlier that you know me from the Bible. This is the place I'm mentioned in the Bible. John 6:66. 666, hmm, that's ominously weird. It says, "*Many of his disciples turned and walked with him no more.*" Yep, that's where I'm mentioned in the Bible.

But there's more to my story. I went home, back to my bakery, that's true. But I kept hearing the stories from those coming to buy my bagels. Never will I forget the day news came from Judea that he had been betrayed by one of his disciples, Judas, and crucified. I met Judas on that day by the sea. Did I tell you that? Judas was the disciple who served the part of the crowd where I was sitting. I'll never forget the moment, as if time were standing still as he brought the bread and fish to me. What is your pastor calling it? A *Thin Place* moment, I think. Yes, a *Thin Place*. It was just that.

Well, as I said, I don't like fish, so when Judas offered it, I kindly refused. Oh, but I grasped the bread. I'm a baker, so that's my life, grasping bread. But this bread was different. Where had it come from, this bread?

I really liked that Judas. He was so kind that day and his eyes betrayed that he was as stunned as any of us were. If it was a trick, he wasn't in on it, I'm sure of that. We made eye contact and he smiled and I felt, well, nourished. Nourished, honestly, by more than bread. Nourished by love, as if from heaven.

Yes, it was a *Thin Place* indeed, and a *Thick Bread* for such a *Thin Place*.

I felt a connection with Judas and if you had told me that day that he would betray his Lord, why, I would never have believed it. I never would have believed that he, too, would one day turn and walk away. And not just walk away as we did that day. Betray him! Kill him!

Jesus' flesh was broken, just as broken as was the bread I tore from Judas' hand that day when time stood still. When I heard the news from Jerusalem I thought, *How? Now?*

That night I prayed long, remembering what he had said, that "*the bread he would give for the world was his flesh.*" Then, somehow, I sensed I was tasting the bread of truth. I began to understand that Jesus, himself, was the sacrifice. It was as though he had to die in order for me to live. I can't explain that fully, but somehow it seemed to all fit together. It was no longer Logic Chopped, but Divine Logic. The Divine Logos, the Divine Word that was made flesh and broken for me.

The news came a few days later that he was alive, that he had walked out of that dark tomb. Even a magician can't do that. Stranger, yet, I heard some talking in my bakery that that Jesus had been seen in the Galilee, had served breakfast to his disciples who had returned to their fishing, and very near the spot where he had fed me that day. We heard that he asked Peter, that loud and brave one, "*Do you love me?*" Three times! Which made sense when I heard that Peter had denied Jesus three times on the night before Jesus died.

Imagine that. Jesus took Peter back. So, I thought, if he would take Peter back, perhaps he will take me back. I was a disciple who turned away. I admit it. But, I've come back. And I remember Jesus saying on the very day I walked away, "*Anyone who comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.*"

I blew one chance at being a disciple. I won't make that mistake again. The world may think it *Chop Logic*, but I believe. *HowNow!*