

The Monster Trap

John 6:61-71

Peter Hiett @ The Sanctuary Downtown

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Prayer

Lord God, if I were a monster, what would you do?

Father we ask that you would help us preach your Word—Jesus. And in his name we pray, Amen.

Message

For several weekends now, we've been looking at John chapter 6.

I hope you remember that it begins with Jesus feeding the multitude, and crowds cheering him to make him King. At the start of the chapter, Jesus is a pop star; by the end of the chapter, the crowds leave, and Jesus asks his disciples if they will leave as well.

You see, Jesus has offended them.

Last week, we began looking at that offense ... that *scandalon*, in Greek. It's where we get our word scandal.

John 6:52 *"The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'"*

They're offended. So does Jesus back off?

Next verse:

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"

At the start of the chapter, Jesus made some bread. They liked the bread and they took the bread. They liked the miracles, and the walking on water. They were ready to form a movement, print some t-shirts, and vote Jesus into office. They came to the Light, but now the Light began to burn. Light burns zombies and vampires.

John already told us, *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil."*¹

¹ That's the judgment now and that will be the judgment then on that day. II Thess. 1:9 – "They will suffer the

See? Jesus is light, and the light is love, and so love burns away the darkness where we hide our sin, our self, our old monster self.

Last week, we preached that apart from Jesus, we are the Walking Dead, enslaved to sin, our monster self. Sin is taking another's life to feed our death, our empty selves. Apart from Christ, we're zombies and vampires. We deny that fact, but denying that fact traps us in that fact by means of an illusion that is the beginning of hell... arrogance, envy, rivalry, resentment, and rage.

In John 6, Jesus tells us that we must, "eat His flesh and drink his blood, and that unless we do, we have no life in us."

That's offensive.

It reveals that we are the walking dead, and in order to live, we must confess our zombie and vampire ways – confess the monster.²

On June 22, 1991, Milwaukee police found a monster hidden in our midst, his house full of the grizzly remains of young men that he had murdered and cannibalized... ate flesh and drank blood. His name was Jeffrey Dahmer.

He was indicted on 17 counts of murder, and sentenced to 957 years in prison.

Recently, I watched an old interview of Jeffrey Dahmer. He said it started with animals. As a boy, he'd dissect them. He wanted to know the mystery we call life, and so he'd take life. And yet the life would be dead after he took it.

The Serpent said to Eve, *"Take from the tree in the middle of the garden."*
But God had said, *"The day you eat of it you will die."*

² See? In a very real sense, I think we've already taken His body and blood. We've already taken His life on the tree. For every sin, His life was taken on the tree.
When we deny it, it is judgment upon us.
When we confess it, it is the miracle of God's grace.
We take His life and then we find he forgave His life.

And that which was our judgment now becomes the greatest blessing. We took His body and blood, but He *for-gave* His body and blood ... and now we become His body and blood. And in the place of that old monster, we become His body and bride. The one forgiven much loves much, and where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

So, when you feel convicted, don't run from your nightmare and hide in your nightmare. If you run from the light, you hide in darkness and the grave. But if you surrender to the light, even though it burns you, it transforms you; He transforms you.

Jesus is light. So let Him offend the hell out of you, so He can create His heaven within you. He said, "Blessed is he who is not offended with me." That's heaven – to be at home in the light. So surrender the monster. But we hide the monster. We say, "I'm no monster."

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was in the middle of the garden. And the Tree of Life was also in the middle of the garden. Some Rabbis taught that they were the same tree. In the New Jerusalem – New Eden – there is only one tree in the middle of the garden. According to Scripture, the cross of Christ is a tree.

Well, Dahmer said his desire became compulsion, and then it moved from animals to people. We think, “What a monster! What could possibly motivate a person to such things?”

This is what Dahmer says:

“To completely control a person – a person I found physically attractive – and keep them with me as long as possible ... even if it meant just keeping a part of them.”

Genesis 3:6

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes and to be desired to make one wise, she took and ate.”

Why did you come to Jesus?

Did you want to know about life – about good and evil? To make yourself wise?

Did you want Jesus ... to keep Him with you as long as possible, even if it meant just keeping a part of him? The part you like?

Why did you get married? Why do you have friends?

Are you attracted to a person such that you want to keep a person – even a piece of a person – with you at all times?

Now listen. I’m not saying Jeffrey Dahmer was not a monster.
I’m saying maybe all of **us** are monsters too.

Maybe the very thing that we call “love” is really lust and consumption and co-dependence.
Maybe the very thing that we call “faith” is sin – that is, taking “the knowledge of good and evil” in an effort to control God.

Isn’t that what most religion is? “Let’s dissect God to learn some stuff about God, so we can possess God, control God, and get God to do our will ... our free will... so we can use God to end poverty and make our country great.”

In the New Testament, one man is portrayed as a monster perhaps more than any other. And this man certainly appears to like Jesus. In fact, he wanted to use Jesus to end poverty and make his country (Israel) great.

He wasn’t a pagan Roman sinner; he was a religious Jew. In fact, his name was “Jew-das,” from the house of “Jew-dah” ... the same tribe as Jesus.

I think he really admired Jesus. He kissed Jesus and Jesus called him “friend.”

He liked Jesus, but he was frustrated with Jesus, because he couldn’t control Jesus. So Judas “handed him over” to the Jews of the House of Judah. He just “gave him over,” and when he saw that they would kill Jesus, Matthew even records that “Judas repented.”

Now, I'm not saying Judas wasn't a monster.
I'm just saying maybe all of us are monsters too.

The New Testament portrays Him as a monster, but a monster that represents Judah and Israel and the people of God. We are the people of God. And, by the way, according to Scripture, he wasn't the worst of sinners. That was another guy.

Well, last time, we talked about the "offense of the cross." It reveals that we are monsters; we are sinners. But we still haven't tackled the heart of the scandal.

See? Some of you may be thinking: "OK, I was a zombie and a vampire, but now I understand Jesus, and I like Jesus, and so I came to Jesus. I chose Jesus!!"

If that's you, you may just be hiding the monster. If so, let's hope we can smoke him out and offend him to death.

John 6:61-70

Jesus said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"

He ascends by means of a cross.

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.³ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) Jesus said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

Does that kind of offend you?

"No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And ["yet" is added by the translator] one of you is a devil." (Diabolos – it means "slanderer," and it's used to refer to people and to Satan.) He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

"Betray" – That's the Greek word *paradidomai*. It literally means, "Give over, hand over." And Scripture makes it clear that Judas wasn't the only one who "gave Jesus over."

Mark 15 – The elders, the scribes, and the council "gave Jesus over to Pilate."

³ We don't just eat His body and drink His blood physically, but spiritually.

Matthew 27 – They (the chief priests and the council) “gave him over,” as they chanted: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

John 18:30 – “The Jews gave Jesus over.”

Like John told us, “He came to his own home and his own people received him not.”

I’m not saying that Judas wasn’t a monster.
I’m saying he wasn’t the only monster.

Listen to Paul in I Corinthians 11:23 –

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered (paradidomai – “gave over”) to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed (paradidomai – “given over”) took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you ... this cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

Did you get that? “I gave over, that Jesus was given over.” I think he’s saying every time I serve communion, every time we take communion, every time we lay our sins at the foot of the cross, we “give Jesus over ...”

After all, He was crucified for our sins, not just the sins of Judas. We give Him over.

And check this out: Jesus gives Himself over.
“He delivered Himself up... He gave Himself over ... for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

John 19:30 – “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and bowed his head and gave over (gave up, paradidomai) His spirit.”

He died for me. He died for Paul. He died for the whole world.
He betrayed His own life for me, and I think for Judas as well.

But tragically, Judas betrayed his own life before he could see Jesus did it for him in his place. Judas hung himself on the tree before Jesus hung on the tree in his place. Judas judged himself, for he didn’t trust Jesus’ judgment.

But you know, according to Scripture, Judas wasn’t the worst sinner.

I Timothy 1:15 – Paul tells us that he himself is the “foremost of sinners.”

In Acts 22 Paul “paradidomai” – gave over – believers to persecution, prison, and death. And what he did to the least of them, he did to Jesus. Jesus even said it, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Paul was a monster, and yet Paul wrote more books of the Bible than any other man. Paul was like Judas – born again.

Well, I hope you see – Judas wasn't the only one who betrayed Jesus. And Judas wasn't the only disciple "offended" by Jesus.

Matthew 26:31 – Right after the last supper and right before He's "handed over," Jesus says to His disciples, *"You will all be scandalized – offended – with me this night."*

See? I think we make Judas the scapegoat. We make him the monster in a way that we are not.

Anthropologists say every society makes scapegoats – either a group or some person to whom they assign all their evil... someone we make last so that we can be first. That's the scapegoat. Well, according to Scripture, there *is* a scapegoat. But it's not Judas.

We want it to be Judas or Pilate, or the Jews, or sinners, or the liberals, or conservatives, or the people lost in hell. And then we say, "They chose it," as if we didn't.

We say, "Sure, I was a monster, but I *chose* to follow Jesus. I (the monster) *chose* to trust (to not be a monster). I *chose* to come to Jesus, I *chose* to trust by my own 'Free Will.' My choice saved me; my will saved me."

Well, maybe your will is the monster.
It wasn't *you* that saved you from *you* and brought *you* to Jesus.

Are you offended? If so, it's probably that monster.

In verse 64, Jesus talks about those who don't believe, and John mentions Judas as an example. Then, just when we think we should despise him, in the next verse (65) Jesus says, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

Then verse 66 – "Many turned away." They were offended.

Check out these verses that we already read in John 6:

37: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will **never** cast out."*

44: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."*

65: *"And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'"*

"All the Father chooses will come," and *"No one can come unless the Father chooses."*

You know that thing we call "Free Will?" "We each have Free Will?"

It's not really free.

And actually, it didn't save you. It damned you. It's the monster.

It's the thing that chose to take the fruit and dissect the Life... chose to take the knowledge of Good and Evil... the thing that saw life, wanted to control life, and took life for itself.

You know, Eve never really had a free will, because she never was free to choose the Good.

How could she choose the Good? She didn't know what it was... what He was ... who He is ... not yet. She couldn't choose Him. We couldn't choose Him.

John 15:16 – *“You did not choose me, but I chose you,”* says Jesus. That's pretty clear.

John 6:37a – *“All that the Father gives me will come to me ... and I will never cast out ... all He gives me...”*

John 3:35 – *“The Father has given all things into the Son's hands.”*

Wow! Does “All things” include Judas?

John 6:70 – *Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And one of you is a devil (a slanderer).”*

That's confusing.

The reason the 11 trust Jesus, and Judas does not ...

The reason the 11 come to Jesus and Judas does not really doesn't depend on their will or exertion.

Romans 9:11 – *“It does not depend on human will or exertion.”* The reason you came to Jesus – to surrender your monster – was not your choice, and not your will, and not your effort. *“It does not depend on human will or exertion, but God who has Mercy.”*

How much mercy? 2 chapters later (Romans 11:32) – *“Mercy on All.”*

Judas didn't come to Jesus, but that doesn't mean that he never comes to Jesus or Jesus doesn't come to him. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul writes that the resurrected Jesus appeared to the 12, and he sure seems to mean Judas – not his replacement. It's like Jesus appeared to Judas in hell. And we say Jesus descended into hell.

Just because Judas is the “son of destruction,” doesn't mean that God can't make him new. Judas hung himself in the Potter's field in the valley of Gehenna.

With the 30 pieces of silver – the blood money – that Judas threw back into the temple (Matthew 27) ... with the blood money, the priests purchased the Potter's field. So with His lifeblood, Jesus purchased the Potter's Field in the valley of Gehenna, in which Judas was destroyed, bursting open like a potter's vessel. And Jesus is the Potter.

A few years ago, my life was thrown into turmoil, and many of your lives were thrown into turmoil... because I said publicly: “I think Jesus may pull it off... that after Hell, destruction, and judgment, He may really ‘Make all things new’... and ‘every knee will bow and every tongue give praise’ ... that ‘all flesh (Isaiah 66:23) shall come worship before him’.... maybe.

And WOW, people were scandalized... pastors, leaders ... they were so incredibly offended. Honestly, for 5 ½ years since I preached a sermon on December 5th, 2004, I've been asking: “Why are they so offended?”

Well, I think it's this: The Grace of God offends the Monster – The religious monster that says, "I'm saved because I chose, I decided, I answered the last question correctly... I'm saved because of my 'knowledge of good and evil,' and because of 'my judgment – my choice'... I chose the good."

People will say, "Peter, it seems like you're diminishing the work of the cross." And I wonder, how can I diminish the work of the cross by suggesting it just might work *always* and never fail?

I've thought about it for 5 years. I think most people see the cross as a test that we can pass or fail. Or maybe a super duper bonus question ... the last question after a long list of other questions that if you answer correctly, it gives you an automatic "A" and trumps all the other questions. That's why it's called Grace.... But it's still a test that you can pass or you can fail.

Now please understand that it IS a test. Jesus and His cross IS a test... it's the whole test. It's the judgment ... it's the TEST.

It's the test that all humanity fails, and has failed already. All humanity was offended, scandalized by the love of God in Jesus.

"This is the judgment... this is the test," writes John. "The light has come into the world and people were offended – loved darkness." All humanity nails Him to the tree.

In the Old Testament, Joshua and Moses cry "choose this day," and then prophesy that all Israel will choose evil. For the truth is, we had already chosen, but wouldn't admit our choice. We hid the monster. The cross is the test that all humanity failed in a garden long ago: That tree is the test that all humanity fails ... and Jesus passes... faithful unto death.

But He not only passes, He passes on our behalf, as He cries: "*It is finished*," bows His head, and *paradidomai* – hands over, gives up – His Spirit. His Spirit, given to the Father, who sends it to us, into the depths of our hearts as we cry, "Abba Father."

Galatians 4:6 – "*Because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of His Son into your heart, crying 'Abba, Daddy, Father'.*"

See? That isn't just you. And it wasn't you that passed the test. Everyone has already failed the test, and Jesus has already passed the test. You don't need anyone to lose so that you can win. You've already lost, and He has already won.

And check this out: *He won by losing on your behalf*. So He says to all the sinners, "You don't need a scapegoat! Look! I'm your damned scapegoat! Damned by God on your behalf." He says to all the zombies and vampires, "You want flesh to eat and blood to drink? EAT ME! DRINK ME! And when you do, it's not your good choice... It's my good choice."

See? No one chooses Jesus, except by the very Spirit of Jesus. God sets the trap, ambushes you with Grace, and fills you with His Spirit... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So no one is saved by their own choice. You can only be saved by God's choice. Yet God even uses all our bad choices to display His good choice, and with His good choice, He transforms all of our bad choices into His good choice – His New Creation, Christ in you.

This is God's choice:
Movie Clip – *The Passion of the Christ*

Jesus: *Take this and eat. This is my body, which is given up for you.*

Jesus lifts up the Passover/communion bread as his disciples surround him at the table. [The scene quickly changes to him being lifted up on the cross, beaten and bruised. Mary and soldiers look on. The scene then returns to Jesus with his disciples at the table he picks up the cup.]

Jesus: *Take this cup and drink. Take this and drink. This is my blood of the new covenant which is given for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.*

[The scene changes to John at the foot of the cross. He looks into Christ's eyes.]

That's your evil choice ... and God's good choice.

What I'm saying is that you've been saved by Grace through Faith, and this (Faith) is not of you, but the gift of God, lest none should boast." That's Ephesians 2:8-9.

Who can boast at the foot of that cross? Only a monster, and not forever.

Did you see the monsters around that cross?

John, the Son of Thunder, who would become the Apostle of Love.

Mary the prostitute, who was the Church—the Bride of Christ.

Soon, a thief would cry out, "Remember me,"

A Roman Centurion would drop to his knees and cry,

"Surely this was the Son of God."

Did you see the ones who crucified Him?

Men like Judas and Paul? Religious men?

See? They were attracted to Jesus, and yet offended by Jesus

Because they couldn't control Jesus.

See? They didn't really love Jesus.

They liked Jesus and wanted to be Jesus

So they tried to cannibalize Jesus. Maybe we all do.

See? They took the fruit from the tree – body broken and blood shed.

But God gave the fruit on the tree – life.

See? They took the fruit, which is knowledge of their evil, yet God gave that fruit

He *fore*-gave that fruit – which is the "knowledge of Good."

He is the Good and the Life.

We monsters take Christ's body and blood; it's sin. It is the disease.

Yet God gave, He *fore-gave* Christ's body and blood – it is the antidote to the disease; the forgiveness of sins.

You see, the cross is like a Monster Trap.

No one comes to Christ with good motives. We're monsters.

No one comes to Christ with good motives, for all a monster has is bad motives.

We came to Christ with no motives but bad motives, and God traps us and gives us His motive – Grace.

We come to Christ in fear, but Christ is perfect Love, and perfect Love casts out fear.

We come as takers, and God turns us into givers and lovers.

Richard Rohr writes, "The great and merciful surprise is that we come to God not by doing it right, but by doing it wrong."

Years ago, God miraculously revealed to me that I went into the ministry because I hated His church. You see? He trapped me by means of my sin, and is transforming it into Grace.

You see Jesus and His cross are like a Monster Trap. We think we chose Him, and all along, He is choosing us. And that's good, for perhaps we have nothing to choose Him with but sin.

Sometime in the mid-1990's, I heard that Jeffrey Dahmer had converted. He had been an atheist, but in 1994, he was baptized in the prison whirlpool. Those close to him claimed that he seemed genuinely sincere.

It caused quite a stir – believers doubted it could be true. Non-believers were furious about talk of forgiveness. I remember thinking about it one day, and suddenly it made sense—sense of him, and sense of me.

You know, evil cannot create. It can only corrupt. So even a bad motive is a good motive that's been corrupted. Original sin was wanting a *good* thing, but *taking* it in the *wrong* way—taking rather than receiving.

Well, suddenly it made sense. Jeffrey Dahmer had encountered "body broken" that was "true food," and he encountered "blood shed" that was "true drink." He saw something that was a "delight to the eyes and good for food" and "to be desired to make one wise." So he took, and that was evil. He took, but God gave. God *fore-gave* and trapped a monster—judged a monster—and turned him into a picture of Grace. God is Grace. And we are being created in his image.

See? I don't think that's much different than my story or much different than your story. Do you find that offensive?

See? We'd like to think a Jeffrey Dahmer is fundamentally different than us, like we're "dead in our sins," but he's *super duper dead* in his. And if we've come to Christ, it's because we made a good choice, and we chose to come with good motives.

See? We'd like to think that we made a good choice because guys like Jeffrey Dahmer made a bad choice.

See? We'd kind of like to feed on his failure to feel like a success. But then aren't we doing the same thing to Jeffrey Dahmer that Jeffrey Dahmer did to his victims? The only difference is that instead of physical cannibals, we're spiritual cannibals—the very worst kind. When we feed on others' failure, we feed the monster, and trap ourselves in hell.

Jane Love helps lead some of our ministries here at the church. A couple of years ago, she wrote to me about an incident that dramatically changed her life. Jane was abused by her father as a child, and struggled for years with un-forgiveness, bitterness, and anger until one day, several years ago, when she turned on the TV and happened to see a show on Jeffrey Dahmer.

She shared that she was just flooded with anger. She remembered when the story had first come out, and how wretched and evil it all was, and how she wanted to hunt Dahmer down and kill him herself. On this show, family members of Dahmer's victims were venting their rage, and in her heart, Jane was beginning to vent her rage too.

"Then," she writes, "I heard God's voice. I heard Him say, 'I love Jeffrey Dahmer as much as I love you.' Then I got it," she writes. "His love for all mankind, and how he could love those who tortured His Son. Later, I heard how Dahmer came to Christ in prison. Some said it was impossible, but I believe that God was telling me He could change any heart."

And you see, God used Jeffrey Dahmer to change Jane's heart.
It was then she forgave her father, and it was then she began to live free.
It was then she surrendered her monster to Jesus.
Or I should say, Jesus set a trap and caused her to lay that monster down.

And just think of this: Jesus is like a Monster Trap that trapped Jeffrey Dahmer.
And Jeffrey Dahmer became a Monster Trap that trapped Jane Love.
And Jane Love became a Monster Trap that trapped her Father.
She forgave him, and before he died, he came to Jesus.
And God uses it all.

We eat His body broken and blood shed, and then we become his body broken and blood shed.
We forgive and then we're free – no longer monsters, but a Monster Trap, in His image.

Communion

So, on the night that He was given over, He took bread and he breaking saying, *"This is my body given to you."* What we *took* is now *given in love*; it's given to us. *"This is my body given to you,"* our Bridegroom says to his Bride, *"take and eat."* And in the same manner, after supper He took the cup saying, *"This cup is my blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you in remembrance of me."*

So come to the table, and when you come to the table, you need to understand:
It's not because you chose Him—the Good. It's because *He* chose you; the Good chose you.

At first, that is profoundly offensive, but then it sets you free.
It's light that kills the monster. Jesus kills the monster, and sets you free.

Get it?

Do you realize that you are not better than anyone else?

Every bad decision is you – the monster, and every good decision is Jesus – the Savior.

Do you realize you're no better than anyone else?

Do you realize you cannot make yourself better than anyone else?

Do you taste how liberating that is?

You're no better than anyone else.

You can have compassion on everyone else.

You can love and be loved in freedom.

That's God's free will in you.

In the name of Jesus believe the gospel and worship.

Prayer

So Father, I thank you for making beautiful things out of us. Lord God, you know how I complain to you, and you know how I kind of feel trapped and offended. Lord God, I thank you that you trap me like Peter, in John chapter 6. And you offend the monster in me.

I thank you that you are the Light, and you are the Truth, and you are destroying that monster because it's that monster that makes me want to feed on the people in this room, to feed on the pastors down the street and around the city. It's that monster that wants to feed on other people's failures to feel better about myself.

Lord God, kill that monster and set me free. Thank you that you are setting us free to love like you, for you Lord Jesus are not the monster; you are Light, you are Love, and you are beauty, and you are Truth. You are making us in your image and you are waking us up from the dead, and I have no stake in the dead but only in the living. So Lord God, may we rejoice in the life that you are pouring out upon us as you rise from the dead in us—the new creation that will never fail.

Father, it's in Jesus' name that we thank you, Amen.

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