

John 6:51-69

A mugwump, described by Teddy Roosevelt, "is a bird that sits on a fence with its mug on one side and its wump on the other." It's someone who can't make up his mind. I suppose that's where we get the expression: "He's a fence-sitter." There aren't too many mugwumps on the healthcare issue. As the town hall meetings are demonstrating, Americans are either strongly in favor of the proposed changes, or strongly opposed to them.

Jesus, however, dealt with a large number of mugwumps. He did, that is, until He addressed them with the words of our text for today. Prior to His discourse on the Bread of Life, many people followed Him not with loyal dedication, but half-heartedly. They enjoyed listening to Him. They were fascinated by His miracles. But they were "fence-sitters." It wouldn't take a whole lot to shake them off the fence and turn them in the other direction away from Jesus.

And that's just what happened in John 6. Following His miracle where He fed the five thousand, Jesus' popularity rating was up. Scores of people leaned their mugs over the fence to watch Him, to listen, to walk with Him. But as soon as He told them, in essence, "I am the Messiah...Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you," these very same people dropped their wumps off the back of the fence, turned their tails in the other direction, and ran away. Why? Because they were offended. "Who can listen to what this man is saying?" they grumbled. They were all for Jesus when it was just peace, love, and miracles. But all this talk about His flesh and blood; about being the Bread of Heaven who gives life to the world--that was too much for their little mugs to grasp. So they stopped being mugwumps. They got off the fence and they quit being His followers.

Today Jesus' church still attracts mugwumps. Whenever and wherever His words are proclaimed people, not all, but some will stop and listen. They may come to a church service. They may pick up a Bible and read a few chapters. They may ask their church-going neighbors some questions about the Christian Faith. Perhaps they're just curious. Perhaps their health is failing and they have concerns about their eternal destiny. Perhaps they're hungry for something more than what our pop culture is feeding them. And so they jump up on the fence and lean their mug over the side to take a look at this Jesus and what He has to say. But they make sure not to lean too far. They're curious but not committed. They have questions but they're not ready to drop everything and become a dedicated disciple of the Lord.

Now this is not to their shame. I'm not saying this to condemn them. Some of the most dedicated Christians began as fence-sitting mugwumps. Perhaps some of you began that way. But there comes a time in the life of every mugwump to stop riding the fence. There comes a time when it is necessary to take action. Either commit to Jesus fully and be His loyal disciple, or get off the fence in the other direction.

Zaccheus was a mugwump. He was curious about Jesus. He also had some guilt over his habit of stealing money from hard-working citizens. And so, as a mugwump, Zaccheus climbed up on the fence to get a look at Jesus as He passed by. But had Zaccheus stayed up on the fence; had he refused to come down from that tree when Jesus called to him, he would have missed out on the life and salvation Jesus had for him and his family. It's not that Zaccheus, as a mugwump, was able on his own to get his wump over the fence. He could not pull himself toward Jesus. No sinner can. So Jesus, through His call of grace, pulled Zaccheus out of the tree to Himself. Jesus was okay with Zaccheus sitting in the tree, but only for a time. When Jesus looked up and saw him sitting there, the

time for being a mugwump was over. "Get off your fence," He told him, "Hurry and come down for today I must stay at your house."

Every Christian congregation today has its Zaccheus'...its mugwumps, but too many of them will make for a weak congregation. Too many members who show up to worship just once a month or so; who contribute just a few bucks of their income; who hesitate to serve on committees; who hesitate to help out when they are needed, make it difficult for everyone else. When too many are sitting on the fence, who will do the work of the Lord? When too many members are cheering us on with their words, but they never get their wumps in gear, it frustrates and burdens those members who truly are dedicated.

And this angers our Lord. In Revelation 3 He says to the church in Laodicea, "I wish you were either cold or hot; but because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of My mouth!" Stop being mugwumps! He is saying. If you're not going to commit to Me and My Church, then get off the fence. Zaccheus, while in the tree, was a man who was lost. When he stopped being a mugwump and came down from the fence, he rejoiced in what Jesus had to give him. And Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house."

Peter, and James, and John, and all the rest of the twelve disciples, except Judas, were not mugwumps...they were not fence-sitters. They watched as the others grumbled against Jesus. They watched as the others became offended and left. And Jesus addressed them, "Do you want to leave also?" But they were not mugwumps. They were committed to the Lord. His words had taken root within them and convinced them that He was their Savior. "To whom shall we go?" was their response, "You have the words of eternal life."

They were with Jesus mugs, wumps, and all. They were not going to leave Him just because His ratings dropped. They were not going to become offended and walk away just because He said some difficult things. For them there was no decision to make. It wasn't, "Should I stay or should I go?" They may have been fence-sitters at one time, but that time was over. They would stay with Jesus even if it meant dying with Him. And they would. As Apostles they would die for Christ for refusing to be mugwumps.

What about you? If you have been a mugwump, Jesus' call is to you today. If you have been a half-hearted follower; a somewhat loyal member, is it not time to commit? Your Lord wants you. Your congregation needs you. The time for riding the fence is over. We have worship services here not just once in a while, but every week. We sit together every week in a class and study the words of Jesus. We have on-going bills to pay and your contribution will help. We have work to do--the joyful work of the Lord--and you can help with that too.

If you are not yet convinced in your heart that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, then keep riding the fence. Keep coming; keep watching; keep listening. But if you know in your heart that Jesus is your perfect Savior who gave all He was and had for you, why are you still on the fence? Why are you only somewhat committed to Him? Why are you still a mugwump?

Do you feel the tug? Do you feel the pull? Jesus' words today are pulling you off your fence. His words are not hard to hear. They are clear and concise..."I died for you, friend. Whether you were or are a mugwump, I died for you. And I forgive you completely for all your sins against Me." Jesus was not half-hearted toward you. He accepted every punishment for your sins. He sat on no fence for you--He was nailed to a bloody cross with a painful crown of thorns stuck into His mug. He

committed to you fully. He took care of your biggest problem--hell. His words, His flesh and blood, give you eternal life.

He did all this freely for you. We're not deserving, but He is merciful. We may act like apathetic mugwumps, but He does not. He took and takes action on your behalf. He did what no one else could do--opened heaven for you, and now here in His words of eternal life, He gives heaven to you. All of this is for each one of you whether you have behaved like a mugwump or not. And so the time for fence-sitting is over. God's grace is here for you. His Sacraments are freely given here. Jesus is here; He is here for you. To who else shall we go? He has the words of eternal life. Amen.