

SERVICE OF THE WORD AUGUST 15, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom prepares a feast, sets her table, and invites all to come and eat her bread and drink her wine.....

Christ, (the wisdom of God, today invites us to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

John's gospel includes no account of the institution of the Lord's supper, but here we can't help hearing Jesus' words as an invitation to the meal of bread and wine we share.

HYMN ELW # 556 MORNING HAS BROKEN

Morning has broken Like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall Sunlit from Heaven,
Like the first dewfall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning,
Born of the one light Eden saw play.
Praise with elation! Praise every morning!
God's re-creation of the new day!

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Ever-loving God, your Son gives himself as living bread for the life of the world. Fill us with such a knowledge of your presence that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life to serve you continually, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
'You that are simple, turn in here!'
To those without sense she says,
'Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.'

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL: John 6:51-58

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for 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. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 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.'

MESSAGE

Pentecost 12

John 6:51-58

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Grace and Peace be unto you from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I go through the process of sermon preparation, I always ask, so what does this text say, what am I hearing and what is the congregation hearing? These are all valid questions. I believe it is also important that we are mindful of what is going on around us and in the world.

Just think of some of the challenges that have been on our plates these past 16 months.

The pandemic and all that goes along with the virus. The anxiety and depression and the list goes on. It has not been an easy time.

Then the discovery of the remains of 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School and then later the remains of over 700 unmarked graves on the Cowessess Reserve here in Saskatchewan.

Racism rampant all over our country and then the Killing of four members of a Muslim family by a person who hated Muslims.

And the list goes on.

So, when I'm reading a text, I am not looking for academic or theological controversies, rather I come to the text for council and comfort in dealing with life.

Two of my go-to resources in sermon preparation are Dr David Lose and Dr. Karoline Lewis. I very much appreciate their insights.

As David Lose says in his comments on this text: "I think I come to the text for meaning, not meaning in the sense of answering all my questions but meaning which makes life worth living."

I say amen to that!

Dr Karoline Lewis suggests that as we listen to this text, we are expecting another sermon on the eucharist. Rightly so - but our text takes us in a slightly different direction. So she says, "...but this is not your ordinary sacrament at the table."

How is it not "ordinary"?

Think about it this way: When we gather as the people of God for Holy Communion and as the pastor prepares us, we hear the words for the institution of the Lord's Supper.

These are the words we hear every time that Holy Communion is celebrated, and these words are central to the "Thanksgiving at the Table": "In the night in which he was betrayed our Lord Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it... then he took the cup..." "Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection and ascension..." I am sure you could fill in most of the blanks because they are so central to our faith.

What is noteworthy, is to remember that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all have these words as part of the institution of the Lord's Supper. In these three Gospels the institution of the Lord's Supper is linked — first to the Passover and secondly to Jesus' death.

Now, John does not include the words to the institution of the Lord's Supper as the other Gospels do. But John does have, Jesus feeding the 5000 as part of this chapter where we are told: "Then Jesus took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them..." (John 6:11 a).

If we can accept that the feeding of the 5000 and the bread of life discourse as we heard it read in our gospel, does this not look very much like John's version of the Last Supper?

This then allows us to "dislodge the sacrament from Jesus' death and locate it in the middle of Jesus' life", so suggests Dr. Lewis. And that gives us permission to ask, how does what John say make a difference in our understanding of Holy Communion?

What difference does it mean if we take seriously that Jesus says he is the Living Bread? "I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven..." 6:51 a., and then Jesus goes on to say in verse 52: "whoever eats of this bread will live forever."

What John has done, helps us to see, appreciate and understand that when we receive Holy Communion it is a celebration of the abundant life with God, NOW! RIGHT NOW! and it is not only a remembrance of Jesus' death.

I have discovered that attention to detail is a good practice when doing biblical work for sermon preparation.

Karoline Lewis puts it this way: "That...life according to John means that what you need for your life to be sustained, God provides: the abundant life."

In John 10:10 we read, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John reminds us that eternal life is not something we postpone to our future, but it is our promise in the present, right now! That any claims about life with Jesus, life with God, means an abiding, it means a real relationship, here and now! Life is not a remembrance of Jesus 'past life or a hope for a future but life lived in the moment as God's grace upon grace.

In John 1:16, we read "From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace." Recall that John's gospel begins with these words: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" and a few verses later (John 1:14a) John says, "and the Word became flesh and lived among us".

In Jesus, the Word was made flesh and the Word was given a physical form, and we meet the God who will be satisfied with nothing less than our whole lives. When Jesus speaks of giving us his flesh and blood, it is helpful to be reminded that "flesh and Blood "can also be understood as a Hebrew idiom which refers to the whole person, hearts, minds, spirit, feeling, hopes, dreams—EVERYTHING!

David Lose puts it this way: "In Jesus, the whole of God meets us to love, redeem and sustain the whole of who we are, good, bad, and ugly."

Throughout John's Gospel we encounter many of the wonderful images that he uses to describe our relationship with God: Jesus is the shepherd; we are the sheep. He is the vine, and we are the branches. He abides in God, and we abide in him. The language John uses here in this text is pressed to its limits.

Jesus' life is so much a part of ours that there can be no separation, that when we receive Jesus, his life clings to our bones.

Martin Copenhaver puts it this way: "He can no more be taken from the believer's life than last Thursday's breakfast can be plucked from one's body."

This is God's promise made to us in the sacrament — to be one with us and for us forever, to stick with us, even in us no matter what.

Jesus is the living bread and when we celebrate Holy Communion, God comes to us to offer us promises that we can touch and feel and taste and eat.

Jesus is the Word that became flesh and lived among us so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

THANKS BE TO GOD
AMEN.

HYMN ELW 518 WE EAT THE BREAD OF TEACHING

Refrain: We eat the bread of teaching, drink wine of wisdom,
are given here a taste of the kingdom.
Together joined, the greatest and the least,
we all are one at Wisdom's holy feast.

Wisdom calls throughout the city, knows our hunger, and in pity
gives her loving invitation to the banquet of salvation. *Refrain*

Simple ones whose hearts are yearning, come and gain from Wisdom's learning;
bread and wine she is preparing, know her loving in the sharing. *Refrain*

Enter with delight and singing, for her richness now is bringing
us this joyous celebration; eat and drink in jubilation. *Refrain*

CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

Amen.

PRAYERS

PEACE

THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD

Let us pray.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

SENDING

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;
be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people;
love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Thanks be to God.

HYMN ELW # 537 ON OUR WAY REJOICING

On our way rejoicing gladly let us go.
Christ our Lord has conquered; vanquished is the foe.
Christ without, our safety; Christ within, our joy;
who, if we be faithful, can our hope destroy?

***Refrain:* On our way rejoicing, as we homeward move,
hearken to our praises, O blest God of love!**

Unto God the Father joyful songs we sing;
unto God the Savior thankful hearts we bring;
unto God the Spirit bow we and adore,
on our way rejoicing now and evermore. ***Refrain***