

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

12th Sunday After Pentecost. August 11th, 2024

Call to Worship

We gather in this place, with these people, in these moments, Gentle God,
**because we hope our self-righteous anger
might become passionate justice for others.**

We gather in this place, with these people, in these moments, Christ our Bread,
**because we hope our complacency with half-lies
might become a hunger for your truth.**

We gather in this place, with these people, in these moments, Gifting Spirit,
**because we hope our fumbling, faltering words
might be transfigured into good news to others.**

**We gather in this place, with these people,
in these moments, God, Christ, and Spirit.**

[Lectionary Liturgies: Liturgy w/communion for August 8, 2021 \(Pentecost 11/Trinity10/Proper 14/Ordinary 19-B\)](#)

Hymn

All who hunger, gather gladly

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1. All who hunger, gather gladly;
holy manna is our bread.
Come from wilderness and wandering.
Here, in truth, we will be fed.
You that yearn for days of fullness,
all around us is our food.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.
2. All who hunger, never strangers,
seeker, be a welcome guest.
Come from restlessness and roaming.
Here, in joy, we keep the feast.
We that once were lost and scattered
in communion's love have stood.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.
3. All who hunger, sing together;
Jesus Christ is living bread.
Come from loneliness and longing.
Here, in peace, we have been led.
Blest are those who from this table
live their days in gratitude.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.

"All who hunger, gather gladly," words by Sylvia G. Dunstan ©1991 GIA Publications, Inc.
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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Living, giving God,
you are the source of all good things.
Your love reaches wider than the expanding universe,

and your kindness embraces the tiny sparrow.
In Christ, you offer us the Bread of Life to sustain us day by day.
Through the Holy Spirit, you are present in every situation,
our daily tasks and demanding challenges.
And so we gather to offer you our love and loyalty,
the very best of ourselves, for surely you deserve all we can offer,
heart, body, mind, and soul, our living, giving God.

**Living, forgiving God,
in Christ you promise us new life.
Yet we often cling to bitter disappointments;
anger can hold us hostage for years.
We say one thing to someone's face
and something else behind their back.
Forgive us.
Free us from old habits and resentments,
and renew us to live according to your mercy.**

God of wisdom, you teach us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Open our minds and hearts to be nourished by your Word, speaking through the Scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread.
Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and will forgive us.
God provides freely, in the bread of heaven,
all the mercy we need for life everlasting.
The good news is forgiveness in the name of Christ Jesus.

Adapted from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009*, © 2008 Abingdon Press. Posted on the Ministry Matters website, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>.

Scripture Reading John 6:35-50

³⁵⁻³⁸ Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own agenda but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

³⁹⁻⁴⁰ "This, in a nutshell, is that will: that everything handed over to me by the Father be completed—not a single detail missed—and at the wrap-up of time I have everything and everyone put together, upright and whole. This is what my Father wants: that anyone who sees the Son and trusts who he is and what he does and then aligns with him will enter *real* life, *eternal* life. My part is to put them on their feet alive and whole at the completion of time."

⁴¹⁻⁴² At this, because he said, “I am the Bread that came down from heaven,” the Jews started arguing over him: “Isn’t this the son of Joseph? Don’t we know his father? Don’t we know his mother? How can he now say, ‘I came down out of heaven’ and expect anyone to believe him?”

⁴³⁻⁴⁶ Jesus said, “Don’t bicker among yourselves over me. You’re not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me—that’s the only way you’ll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet, ready for the End. This is what the prophets meant when they wrote, ‘And then they will all be personally taught by God.’ Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to the Father, really listening and therefore learning, comes to me to be taught personally—to see it with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, from me, since I have it firsthand from the Father. No one has seen the Father except the One who has his Being alongside the Father—and you can see *me*.

⁴⁷⁻⁵¹ “I’m telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your ancestors ate the manna bread in the desert and died. But now here is Bread that truly comes down out of heaven. Anyone eating this Bread will not die, ever. I am the Bread—living Bread!—who came down out of heaven.

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Message Alive and Whole

Late in July, I flew back to Alberta to not only attend the Celebration of Life for one of my uncles but to officiate at it. I was so honoured to have been asked to do so for I loved this uncle dearly. Some of my most distinct memories of joy as a child involved my Uncle Gerard. I also recognized that, save for my cousin and his wife, my dad, and my brother and sister-in-law, no one else in my family had ever heard me preach in person. I believe a few of them watch the worship videos, but to see what I am like or how I am as a preacher and minister in the flesh was something few had experienced. So, it was with hope and gratitude, along with a little trepidation, that I ventured off to be with my family in this time of remembering, honouring, and tears. Thankfully it seemed to go over well enough.

I also got to spend the whole day with extended family, some of whom I had not seen or really had opportunity to speak with in the nearly fourteen years that I have been away. There is a major age difference between myself and many of my cousins so when I left my hometown many of them were young and our lives were in very different places. Part of the joy of the day was connecting with them now. They have varied and interesting lived experiences. One of my favourite moments came when one cousin, who I think had some reservations about what I was like, and likely a few preconceived notions due to the fact that I am a minister said to me, “Oh, you are just you.” Not sure what he was expecting, but I guess he was satisfied that I could be both a minister and be just who I am at the same time.

As I was preparing to go to Alberta it was a line from this very piece of scripture that was in my mind when, after Jesus says “I am the Bread of Life” and offers up a strong defense regarding that, the people say Hold on! We know you, we know your family, you parents, how can Jesus now say, ‘I came down out of heaven’ and expect anyone to believe him?

It is often the people who think they know us the best who have the hardest time believing certain things about us. But this piece about Jesus is much bigger than anything we may have experienced. We know we are mere mortals who struggle with sin. We often mess things up knowingly and unknowingly.

And when Jesus says to the people who have followed him across the lake “I am the bread of life” all they see is the carpenter son, the guy they grew up with, even though just the day before they witness him perform a miracle of providing enough food for everyone. Jesus to them is as ordinary as they come. Not only that, gods, well they are supposed to be powerful, not needing any mere human to achieve their ends. In fact, often humans were thought to be pawns in the games of the gods. If their God who was known to them through the stories of the ages was powerful, God would not be working with this guy Jesus. And the audacity of Jesus to claim that he and God were in this together.

And Jesus is not helping the situation, the more they bicker, snicker, and argue about him, the more adamant he gets about his relationship with God and the work that God is doing through him. It could also be that the people could not get their minds wrapped around the fact the God was and is choosing to work through humankind. Yet if you recall, the Hebrew people were looking for Emmanuel, meaning God with us, God was truly with them, walking with them literally, figuratively, and spiritually, through this one named Jesus.

Unlike other gods, God of the Hebrew people, and the God to whom we as Christians look to for relationship with human beings, our God does not demand that we believe yet willingly leads us to believe that God is God and Jesus is the one sent to show us God in the flesh. It feels like such a conundrum to explain mostly because it is not explainable.

Just this past week, I was doing a service at a senior’s residence. One person who had attended the service whispered to me, “When you are done visiting with everyone, I have a question for you.” So, before I was set to leave, we sat and visited. Now she, a long time Christian, said to me, “I can get my mind wrapped around the thought of God. I understand my need for a saviour in Jesus Christ, but what is it with the Holy Spirit. I don’t understand that.”

I realized then, as I so often have and as I am attempting to unpack this scripture, that there is no really succinct language to use when talking about or trying to explain God,

Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is not that it is airy fairy stuff, it is that it is deeply personal yet fully lived in community...in relationship with one another, but first and foremost lived in relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is earthy yet we are not able to pin point a spot or touch God. And how does one begin to describe God or our relationship to and with God. If we could describe God we would and should be at a loss.

So Jesus uses bread to describe the ordinary and the extraordinary. I appreciate the way Professor Matt Skinner talks about the progression of the story of Jesus supplying bread to people. So I am loosely using his explanation and sharing it with you. This story about bread actually begins earlier as Jesus provides food for a crowd of at least 5000 using five barley loaves and two fish and miraculously multiplying the provisions. It points to the fact that people need to be fed right now in their everyday lives. Food for their bodies. It is an immediate need.

The story continues with the crowd following Jesus the next day, because they want to be fed again. In other words, people want food on a regular basis. It is an ongoing need. Then the scripture from today points to the desire we have for even more food security. This kind of security is for a lifetime and beyond. So Jesus begins to speak of eternal life.

People need bread for their bodies but also, whether or not they realize it, people crave the bread of heaven immediately, on an ongoing basis and the knowledge that it is ours eternally. There is security in that, and if nothing else God is safe in the sense that God is always present, is there when we need, but present to us always.

For the writer of the Gospel of John, eternal life in Christ speaks not only to an eternal life beyond this life, but immediately to the quality of our lives. Are we living in and with love? Love for those we love but also love for those who would do us harm or are difficult to love.

As usual, I am not advocating that you place yourself in harms way or think that you have to stay in an abusive relationship. This is about love that is broader and deeper than we can imagine in any human being. We human being are fragile and often broken, but the call on our lives through Jesus is the we can have eternal life in Christ. Eternal life is another way of saying we believe in Christ. We may question, but knowing that not everything can be answered we trust and believe, we abide in the love and knowledge of Christ. All of this to say that eternal life is about being in relationship with Jesus.

The question or questions become what does this kind of life mean? What kind of life is Jesus offering us? All of this is deeply connected to the resurrection and the ascension of Christ after the crucifixion.

It is again important to remember that all we know about Christ was written by those who lived and experienced Jesus in the flesh and were witnesses to the death, resurrection and ascension. These words were written...these stories shared after the fact. And those who wrote and spoke about Jesus continued to live as people who believed.

Christ died, but Christ, a fully human person who understands our challenges and what it means to be flesh and blood is also fully God. This is not something that is explained, but rather it is lived in the knowledge of that truth. Understanding Jesus as friend, brother, guide, God, and living in that knowledge changes everything. It changes us.

Jesus offers us a relationship where God abides with, through, and in us, and because of that we are changed. We live differently. Our circumstances may not change, through often they do, but somehow that relationship gives us a new lens from which to view and understand the world. The response to the relationship freely given, is to love, have compassion, seek justice, and to live humbly with God. No pretenses, only who we are offered to Christ as Christ offered himself to us.

Life, eternal life, becomes the knowledge of God with us lived out each day in our words, thoughts and actions. Life, eternal life, becomes the knowledge that God loves, Jesus lives, and the Holy Spirit is moving in us and in the world. Though this work were are made fully alive and whole. Praise be to the God of love and life!

Prayers of the People

God of all generations,
When we look back at our lives,
we are grateful for your steadfast presence with us
through uncertainty and upheaval.
We have witnessed tragedy and courage;
generosity and selfishness, resentment and resilience,
fear and faithfulness.
Teach us how to share our trust in you
with the world around us in the days ahead.
God of each life and all life,
Keep us faithful, whatever happens.

God of nations and neighbours,
We look back over the past few months, and we worry for the world.
We have witnessed both conflict and compassion,
deep differences and calls for collaboration.
Send your Spirit to guide our leaders in politics, education, health care,
in business, labour and community life.
Create understanding across differing perspectives
for the wellbeing of those who struggle with their daily realities.

Sustain truth telling and mutual respect in our common life.

God of healing and hope,

We look around at the world and worry about the unpredictable climate,
and its huge costs to communities and individuals.

We look around and see people without doctors,
people on long waiting lists for care,
people without homes they can afford or food on the table.

Hear us in this holy silence

as we name in our hearts those people and situations that concern us deeply.

God of family and friends,

We look around at our lives

and give you thanks for all our sustaining relationships,
those nearby and those we maintain over distance.

Where people live in loneliness, show us how to reach out.

Where people struggle with differences or discrimination,
show us how to offer wisdom and encourage mutual respect.

Inspire us with Jesus' all-embracing love

and make us instruments of his peace and purpose,

For we pray the words he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

Scripture speaks of God's goodness and generosity over and over again. So we keep offering our gifts to God in gratitude, over and over again. May our gifts help to feed the world with God's goodness for the sake of Christ, the Bread of Life.

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1. Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.
2. Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.
3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

Text: 87 87 87 7; William Williams, 1717-1791; tr. from the Welsh by Peter Williams, 1727-1796, and William Williams. Music: John Hughes, 1873-1932.
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Benediction

Having been filled by the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ,
go into this world where hunger and thirst persist.
Bring the healing, life-sustaining, nourishing word of God
and the peace and love of Jesus Christ.
Offer the transforming witness of the Holy Spirit to all you meet.
Go in peace and may God's peace always be with you.

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