

August 22, 2021 – Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Introduction to the Day

In today's gospel many people take offense at Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood; even many of Jesus' disciples peel off. This is the backdrop in John's gospel for Peter's confession of faith. "To whom can we go?" asks Peter, in words we sometimes sing just before the gospel is read. "You have the words of eternal life." In order to take such a stand, as Peter and Joshua did, Paul tells us to arm ourselves with the word of God.

We pray in the Spirit that we might be bold ambassadors of the gospel.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
the God of manna,
the God of miracles,
the God of mercy.

Amen.

Drawn to Christ and seeking God's abundance,
let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God, our provider,
help us.

It is hard to believe there is enough to share.

**We question your ways when they differ from
the ways**

of the world in which we live.

**We turn to our own understanding
rather than trusting in you.**

**We take offense at your teachings and your
ways.**

Turn us again to you.

Where else can we turn?

**Share with us the words of eternal life
and feed us for life in the world.**

Amen.

Beloved people of God:

in Jesus, the manna from heaven,
you are fed and nourished.

By Jesus, the worker of miracles,
there is always more than enough.

Through Jesus, † the bread of life,
you are shown God's mercy:

you are forgiven and loved into abundant life.

Amen.

Gathering Song

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, your word feeds your people with life that is eternal. Direct our choices and preserve us in your truth, that, renouncing what is false and evil, we may live in you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Children's Message

Gospel – John 6:56-69

[Jesus said,] ⁵⁶“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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 forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Message

People of God, grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

We've come to the final installment of our Life FOR Life series.

We've encountered the young boy who wondered if the basket of bread and fish that he had was enough to feed the crowd of 5,000 that Jesus ordered his disciples to feed. And it was. To the point of an abundance of leftovers.

That crowd followed Jesus and the disciples to the other side of the sea, seeking more, only to be reminded that the more they seek is not that which their ancestors had, but it is Jesus himself, right in front of them.

This starts to become unsettling for them. The Jews in the crowd, feeling the challenge to generations of teaching, start to question, but Jesus reminds them, “Don't go and complain, wondering where this is coming from. Rather, realize what this can do for you.”

He urges them to ponder the promise of eternal life, what this might mean for them, and invites them to make a home, a dwelling place, in this very promise.

To which they respond: “This teaching is difficult to accept.”

They aren't wrong. We've had our own wonderings about what this means for us as people of faith. As Jesus invites us, urges us, to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, we don't have to look far to see how this mandate has divided the church. We ourselves have gotten bogged down in the literal meaning of what Jesus is calling us to and have lost sight of what this is truly for.

Upon his assertion, a bit of a warning if you will for those first hearers, and a word of affirmation and assurance for us who've heard it throughout generations, some of those who had been following (called disciples in this case) left and went home. The promise of which he spoke became too much. That which they had been taught, which they knew so well, won out over what life with Christ could be.

But Jesus doesn't mourn their leaving. Instead he turns to the twelve who are still with him.

“Do you wish to go?”

It's a valid question. After all, again, we too have grappled with what this promise means for us.

We have wrestled with our own feelings of wondering if we are enough.

We have struggled with our seeking for the more that is Christ.

We are bombarded with the fear of what eternal life will be, missing the point that it has already been promised to us and we are called to live in the “because of” and not the “so that” of the promise.

We, too, ask ourselves, would it be easier to just turn back?

In my first call I was bringing students home from confirmation and one of them, a seventh grader, asked me:

“Pastor, do you really believe this stuff?”

I was speechless, which doesn’t happen very often. I knew I believed it, but I wasn’t ready to answer it. My life flashed before my eyes and in that moment I thought of all the times where my faith my have been tested. I finally landed on, “I don’t know how not to believe this stuff.”

I don’t share this to say, “look at me, I’m just like Simon Peter, the Rock on which Jesus builds his church.” Instead, this is part of my story. And we’ve all got our own stories. And our own stories have their parts. They have their moments. They have the times of, “do I really believe this stuff?”

Simon Peter, responding to Jesus’ question says, “to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

But Simon Peter doesn’t stop there. And, in his not stopping at that, we get our call to action in this Gospel text.

“We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

They have experience Christ. They’ve realized that life without him is unimaginable. They have come to believe because they have been given Jesus. They have seen him, experienced him, and know the promise that is him.

And that is what we are called to do. As people of faith, called to build up the Body of Christ, we are called to give people Jesus.

We are called into moments, our own and others, where there is the wonder of if we are enough, with the assurance that we indeed are.

We are called into the moments, our own and others, where there is that search for more, to be reminded that the more we seek is Christ himself.

We are called into moments, our own and others, where we question eternity, to remember that this is a “because of” promise and not a “so that” ultimatum.

We are called into moments, our own and others, where we question if the Good News of God’s Love can really come from the messenger that it comes from, that it isn’t about the messenger, but what it means for us.

We are called into moments, our own and others, where we question where it is that we should abide, and we are reminded to abide in the Life that is Christ.

We are called into moments, our own and others, where we question if this is all worth it, and we are reminded of the call to show people Jesus.

And, when we do that, the world is fed. The world is fed with the abundance that is God’s Love for God’s people. And that love leads to Life Abundant.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

Song of the Day

Apostle's Creed

Prayers

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

God of courage, bless all leaders of your church. Make them ready to proclaim the gospel of peace and strengthen them to preach your loving word. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of creation, bless fields and orchards. Protect the land from drought and bring life-giving rain to support growth. Instruct your people in wise treatment of the world you have provided for all your creatures. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of community, bless all who seek justice between nations and peoples. Give guidance to bridge-builders, heal divisions, and inspire cooperation in times of crisis, disaster, and war. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of compassion, bless all who are in any need (*especially Peyton, Kathy Smith, Matt Miller, Bill and Betty Davey, Bob Kries, Jim and Sandy Nelson, Joe Christensen, Marilee Julson, Bill and Bonnie Kuehn*).

Accompany all who are lonely and feeling abandoned and remind them of your abiding presence. Accompany all who are persecuted and exploited and open us to their cries. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of change, bless our transitions. Guide all who are embarking on new stages in life such as a new job, new school, or new community (*especially*). Sustain enduring friendships and kindle new relationships and interests. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of comfort, bless all who mourn the deaths of their beloved ones. We give you thanks for the saints who have gone before us (*especially*). Renew our confidence in your promise of resurrection and life in the world to come. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Offering

Offertory Prayer

Jesus, Bread of life,
you have set this table with your very self,
and called us to the feast of plenty.

Gather what has been sown among us,
and strengthen us in this meal.

Make us to be what we receive here,
your body for the life of the world.

Amen.

Words of Institution – We invite you to find bread and wine or juice and partake in this Holy Meal.

(Holding the bread) In the night in which we was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and broke it, gave thanks and gave it for all to eat saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

(Holding the cup) Again after supper he took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it for all to drink saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. So often as you do this, remember me."

Once you've taken the elements say, "Wellspring of joy, through this meal you have put gladness in our hearts. Satisfy the hunger still around us, and send us as joyful witnesses, that your love may bring joy to the hearts of all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**"

Lord's Prayer

Sending Song

Blessing

The blessing of God,
who provides for us, feeds us, and journeys with us,
✠ be upon you now and forever.

Amen.

Go in peace, you are the body of Christ.