



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

Wisdom prepares a feast, sets her table, and invites all to come and eat her bread and drink her wine. The first chapter of John's gospel owes much to the biblical tradition that imagined Wisdom as existing before anything was created and having a role in the work of creation. Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), 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.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

We again gather in spite of distance and pandemic, in the name of Christ the bread of life, who feeds us with God's Word and nourishes us with God's grace.

And in our gathering we take the time to give thanks for the gift of baptism, in which God's Word and grace are manifest. In the water we are reminded of God's presence among us. In the gathering we are reminded of the community of saints to which we belong. In the whole ritual we are reminded that we are God's dearly beloved and brought and welcomed into new life.

So those of you who have water in front you, you may dip your fingers into it. Interact with it. Feel the water as it clings to you, envelopes you, and holds you close. And then, if you are willing, use the water to mark your foreheads with the sign of the cross. Know and believe that God is with you, with us, loving us all into eternal life.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: We Come to the Hungry Feast (#479)

GREETING

The gracious presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, the loving welcome of God, and the uniting communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 184)

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you give us the true bread from heaven in your Son Jesus, who is your eternal Word made flesh. Help us all to receive this truth, that we in turn might be the body of Christ for the world, sharing your grace and peace with all who hunger and thirst, in the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Proverbs 9:1-6

A reading from Proverbs.

Wisdom is portrayed as a woman who invites people to partake of her banquet. Just as ordinary food is necessary for physical life, Wisdom's food—insight and understanding—is necessary for fullness of life with God. Partaking of Wisdom's banquet is the way to life.

¹Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.

²She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.

³She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,

⁴"You that are simple, turn in here!"

To those without sense she says,
⁵"Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 34:9-14

⁹Fear the LORD, you saints of the LORD,
for those who fear the LORD lack nothing.
¹⁰**The lions are in want and suffer hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack nothing that is good.**
¹¹Come, children, and listen to me;
I will teach you reverence for the LORD.
¹²**Who among you takes pleasure in life
and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?**
¹³Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from lying words.
¹⁴**Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:15-20

A reading from Ephesians.

True wisdom integrates our new reality in Christ with our Christian fellowship and daily conduct. Because we are filled with the Spirit, Christians regularly rejoice together, give thanks to God for one another, and care for one another. In this way we revere our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: John 6:51-58

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In John's gospel, the feeding of the five thousand leads to extended teaching in which Jesus identifies himself as the true "bread of life." Finally, in these verses, he makes a connection that would not be understood until after his death, in light of the church's celebration of holy communion.

[Jesus said,] ⁵¹“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those 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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Almighty God, through your divine discernment you feed us with your living Word. Nourish our souls with your truth, that we be filled with the Spirit, guiding us on the path of eternal life, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Again, I'd like to welcome myself back from holidays, which in a lot of ways felt like the first real holiday I've had since this pandemic started. I know, I did take some time off last year, but for various reasons, it didn't really feel like time off. Maybe because the time away was split up more so they were smaller chunks of time and felt too short. Maybe it was because that time off was when the pandemic was still kind of fresh and the stress of it all was still all around me. Or maybe (or probably, actually), it was because I, by my own volition, decided to work about 60-70% of the time I was away.

But this time was different. While I did work a little bit through my time away (less than 20%), it was still a longer chunk of time off and this time around the stress around the pandemic really wasn't that bad thanks to the vaccinations we've been getting. But I think the main reason why it felt like holidays this time is because my goodness did it go by fast. I guess that means that I was actually able to rest and unwind because I just blinked my eyes and it was time to go back to work.

Time works funny that way, doesn't it? When you want it to slow down, it speeds up and when you want it to speed up, it's like it's standing still. Think about how fast these two months of summer break would go by when we were kids, and then think about how that one month that leads to summer would take forever. Or how parents of adult children tell me how quickly they grow up but then I go home and see my kids being kids and I'm like, “Still?!?” Or just how any time of your life that is good, pleasant, or happy seems to go by so quickly but when things aren't going your way? Well that just seems to drag on and on and on.

Time sure is a funny thing.

Our second reading for today starts with a somewhat confusing line, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”

Suddenly time isn't so funny anymore, is it? Sure, maybe not funny per se, but can we really say that it's evil? Seems a bit harsh.

It has been said that time is one of the most precious gifts of all, and that there is no greater gift to give someone than your time. But Paul tells us through his letter to the church in Ephesus that the days are evil? It doesn't exactly seem to make sense.

But then when we read further in Paul's words, we see that he is talking more about wasting time, in that we use the time that we've been given solely for our own pleasure, our own selfishness, and our own gratification instead of considering the needs or feelings of others. Essentially, Paul is talking about the time that isn't spent in being a good person and helping others. Time is wasted when you aren't using it in building up relationship and community. Time is evil when it hasn't been recognized as a gift.

At this point, all the introverts out there just shuddered and cringed, like "I don't want to spend all my free time with others, that would literally kill me." And to be honest, I don't think that is what is being asked of us here. I don't think that to satisfy what Paul is saying in our second reading, we have to party and be around people all the time (or dry party at least, as Paul speaks against drunkenness too). But rather, I think Paul is just talking about living selfishly versus living selflessly.

Now you might be thinking, I was just talking about actually having taken some time off, able to relax and unwind, and just catch my breath in the midst of it all. Isn't that selfish? I'm doing it for myself, after all.

And then now some of you might be thinking, no no no that's not selfish at all, we need to fill our own cup before we can fill others. And I get it, and I agree. I just want to clear up any confusion that might be happening here.

What I think Paul is actually getting at is talked about in the gospel lesson. Jesus is calling himself the living bread from heaven, or more famously translated, the bread of life from heaven. We have heard about Jesus being called this a lot in the past. We've sung about it even. And if all things go as planned, we will sing about it again later in this service. So it isn't an unfamiliar term for us, although the concept might be.

This particular passage is a bit more graphic than we are perhaps used to. Although we do get it every few years, it always seems to get me a little when I hear Jesus talking about us gnawing and chewing on his flesh and guzzling up his blood. I'm not adverse to the horror movie genre at all, but there is just something about eating human flesh that gives me the chills.

But of course, Jesus isn't speaking literally. He doesn't actually want people to eat him. Although, he might have been thinking "bite me" when being hassled by some of the religious leaders at the time, but that would have been figurative too. But Jesus was describing how his way of life, his teachings of grace and mercy and community, how God's love for him and us all is reflected through his actions, is the staple of our very lives.

Just as bread would be the staple of their diet, the first thing they would ask for when hungry, the very source of sustenance for all the people of the area and time, so is Jesus' teaching, God's very Word, the source of all that is good and just, a staple for all of us throughout history.

I just wish Jesus wasn't so graphic. I also wish he didn't use bread as I think potatoes are much more of a staple around the world. However, I did do some research and apparently Jesus didn't have access to any potatoes whatsoever.

Whatever the case, this is what Paul was talking about in regards of our time. That while we might think that living for ourselves is just the bee's knees, Paul is trying to warn us that it actually isn't. It isn't as fulfilling as we think, it isn't as joyous, it isn't really life. Instead, the life that truly is life that is promised to us by God through Christ is found in these exact teachings of grace and peace. It is found in this way of living for each other in community. It is found in this bread of life from heaven.

But it isn't some sort of magic spell or something that will somehow allow us to just be happy all the time, but a process for us to see and understand that we actually aren't alone in this world, but surrounded by God's people and all the saints, where we can learn to live in harmony with each other, selflessly serving and lifting each other up. And it isn't a one-time thing either, but a fundamental shift in who we are, how we see the world, and of course how we treat each other.

And this is the bread of life from heaven. But just as some workout advice I read once said, "Eating one bad meal doesn't make you unhealthy, just like how eating one good meal doesn't make you healthy", so are we to continually partake in this bread of life, chew on its truths, wrestle with its teachings, and digest its promises. And just as food does to our bodies, this heavenly food will begin to be reflected in our lives, in our relationships, and in how we spend our time in community with God and each other.

So come, all of you who are weary and thirst. The table of the universe has been set and you are all invited to sit, stay, and be part of the larger body of Christ in the world, filled with the Spirit to do good, and live among and spend time with all of God's beloved children.

As we continue in this season after Pentecost, may we continually hunger and yearn for the bread of life from heaven, that we might partake in the body and community of Christ, granting us the life that truly is life. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: I Am the Bread of Life (#485)

CREED

With the whole body of Christ, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's 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 OF INTERCESSION

Led to be part of the body of Christ in the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God in your mercy" and you are all invited to respond with "hear our prayer". God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, in you we lack nothing for you provide for us all that we need for life and community. May we continually be nourished by the bread of life, that our service to you and others benefit all the world. God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your joy and peace are neverending, even when we fail to see and recognize it. May we always be sensitive to your presence, that the knowledge of your blessing inform us in our ministry and service. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Hope Lutheran Church in Nanaimo and their pastor Terry Richardson and intern pastor Nicolas Alexandre; and for all the institutions in our church that care for the elderly. God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we come to you in reverence and listen to your voice of love throughout all of creation. Help us to properly care for this planet that you have entrusted to us, that it remain our home and source of life for generations. God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, the temptation of the pleasure and prosperity that comes with power has plagued our society and world, and your promise of peace often feels out of reach. Be with all world leaders and politicians that they might ably lead us to live in harmony with each other and away from the threat of violence. We pray especially for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maেকে Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that find the safety and security they need. God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you protect us from evil and help us to do good. You restore us into wholeness and heal us with your love. Be with those of us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and make your love and healing apparent to us all. We pray especially for Beulah; Diana; Marie; Bev and family; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; those who continue to be negatively affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we turn to you for your goodness and peace, as you promise us eternal life with you and all the saints. May all whom we have loved and lost remain in our hearts, that their memories be a constant support in our lives of faith and community. God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your uniting love found in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERATORY HYMN: Here Is Bread (#483)

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, everything good comes from you, and we give you thanks for feeding and nourishing us with the bread of life from heaven, your very son Jesus our Lord. May this food before us be a reminder of your providence, that as we eat and drink we might feel the unity with you and all the saints, through the work and grace of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ;
who on this day overcame death and the grave,
and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord our God, in you we lack nothing that is good, for even in our sin you regard us as saints and provide for our every need. We come to you and listen, and we revere your holy name. You give us discernment over evil and instill in us a desire to do good. And in the fullness of time, you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to teach us of your truth and grace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal where he took some bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, “take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

And after they ate it, he took the common cup, gave thanks and shared that saying, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

It is through this food that we receive the bread of life from heaven, nourishing us with peace and grace, even as we together declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

All honour and praise be to you, O God, for your providence and love, allowing us to be one with you and all the saints through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

Gathered together as the body of Christ, let us pray as he taught us.

**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 COMMUNION

Taste and see that God is with us.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 191)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Gracious God, you have again revealed to us the bread of life and have filled us with your truth and promise. Continue to be with us in our life’s journey and may we faithfully serve you, empowered by the love of Christ, through whom we pray. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May our God the source of life bless you and keep you,
Christ the bread of life shine on you and be gracious unto you,
the Spirit the power of life look upon you with favour and give you peace.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Let Us Go Now to the Banquet (#523)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, filled with and united by the Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

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