

12th Sunday after Pentecost August 15, 2021



“WISDOM QUEST”

St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL
397-6323

Rev. Rosemary Captain

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Leader: Come into this household of God that we might all listen to God’s Word and discern the wisdom that comes only from God.

People: How can we discover such wisdom?

Reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom. When we choose to live according to God’s will and plan, God will give to each of us a wise and discerning heart.

God fills us with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs! We have come praise with music from our hearts.

Jesus is here in our midst as living bread. We want to be nourished and strengthened that we may remain with him. Jesus is so close to us that we can taste his presence.

Praise the Lord! Learn of God’s compassion and mercy. Praise the Lord with our hearts! Praise the Lord!

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

To you, God our Parent, we give thanks at all times and for everything. Now we come in the Spirit, to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody with heart and voice in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us give God our thanks and praise.

***GLORIA PATRI:**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. Amen.

GOSPEL LESSON: John 6:51-58

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

⁵² Then the Jews debated among themselves, asking, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Human One and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them.

⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

These are the ancient words given to us that we may read them anew.

Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE: “What does this mean?”

I don't know about you, but I find this passage difficult. I went to several commentaries for help. My goal was to break down this message to make it more palatable. After all, it comes right after Jesus fed the 5,000.

Jesus is trying to get an important message across but the Pharisees and the people in the crowd are not helping. Jesus fed them once and a few hours later they were hungry again. So, they followed Jesus and were expecting another free meal.

Jesus refused. They cried “not fair! Moses provided enough manna to keep the fleeing Hebrew people full.” Jesus corrected them. “The manna was sent from God, not Moses. And the manna did not fill them up forever. Eventually they all died.”

Jesus said, “What would you think about bread that lasted forever?” The people were intrigued at first but when Jesus said that HE was the bread, they turned their noses up. “No way! There's no such thing as bread that lasts forever and how can YOU be the bread?”

I believe for most of them AND US the main problem is when Jesus says in verses 53 – 56, “⁵³ I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Human One and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

“⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. “ The problem for me are the words, “flesh” and “blood”. I don’t get it. So, let’s see what we can find out.

Fred Craddock, the famous preacher and scholar, wrote “We can well approach this text by first getting in touch with the language with which our biblical ancestors expressed their most profound experiences: grief, remorse, repentance, devotion, love, and joy of life. We who tend to associate all these emotions with “the heart” encounter the ancient writers’ descriptions in terms of bone, breath, flesh, marrow, joints, and stomach. Many of us know how totally the human frame is affected by significant experiences, but we do not express it so fully. For example, in Psalm 102 the psalmist’s sin and remorse reverberate through every bone and sinew.

Dr. Craddock continues, “The assumption is that eating and drinking, flesh and bone, are not to be

separated from the experiences of soul and spirit. In fact, the New Testament knows no more meaningful act for effecting and witnessing to the relationship of Christians with one another and with Christ than eating together.”

The New Testament is filled with images and analogies that express the close relation of believers with Christ. Paul speaks of one body, of union in his death and resurrection, of Christ in us, and of our being in Christ. The gospel of John that we read from today gives us many of our familiar expressions of this relationship: shepherd and sheep, vine and branches, abiding in God’s house, Christ abiding in God as WE ABIDE IN CHRIST.

However, in today’s passage, language is pressed to the limit to express union and full participation of one life in another. Verse 56 ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. “

Rev. Craddock continues, “We cannot live by bread alone. But the image of Jesus not only providing bread but BEING the bread was pressed even further, joining it with the common understanding that eating and drinking are the very epitome of intimacy and union. Jesus offers himself as the food and drink. Here, then, is divine self-giving, life for life, and by full participation in Christ’s

word, his life, and his death, the believer abides in God.”

I realize all this might be hard to swallow or digest. Yet there is another point that helps me understand the importance of this message. In the very beginning of this Gospel, the very first chapter, the author wrote in verses 1-4 and 14: “¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus was the Word became flesh and lived among us. Jesus shared his flesh and blood with us throughout his ministry and especially, on the cross.

When we read these words, can we “drink” it all in? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with silent personal prayer.

Dear Creator of all things, we ask your help. In our world of hunger and thirst, bring that which

nourishes all.

In our world of violence, bring understanding and peace.

In our world of pain, bring relief and healing.

In our world of every changing ecology, bring knowledge and compassion for our globe.

In our world of loneliness, bring companionship and compassion.

In our world of little trust, bring us faith in each other and in you.

In our world of the lost, and those who are searching, bring the truth of your love and your Son. . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your 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 debts as, we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO SHARE: Thank you for supporting your church during this pandemic.

***COMMISSIONING:**

Go forth into the world trusting with your hearts the wisdom God bestows upon all who seek to follow

God's will. When called to lead, do so with humility and confidence in God. Be in this world a sign of Jesus' presence. Share compassion with all whom you encounter. Live wisely in God's name, and glorify God in all you do.

And may the grace, mercy and wisdom of God be our support, guidance and strength from this day forward and for ever more. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe Knapp, Jim Garrett, Agnes Doctolero, Julie Walker, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz, Warren Neff, Jack Harris, Wayne Huff, Jackie Canterbury, Sherry Hackbarth, Doris Moody.

**Please call the office if you know anyone presently
in the Belleville or Shiloh Memorial Hospitals**