

**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
AUGUST 22, 2021**



“This message is harsh. Who can hear it?”

**St. John United Church of Christ
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**Please stand if comfortably able*

*Please respond with words in **bold** print*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal

CCLI LICENSE #11164431

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**PRELUDE: “Come, Thou Almighty King/We Will
Glorify” Carol Tournquist**

***CALL TO WORSHIP: (Based on Psalm 84)**

**ONE: With profound happiness, we welcome one another.
How good it is to approach the courts of our God!**

**MANY: Happy are those who live in God’s house!
Singing our praise to God fills us with joy.**

Here we welcome both friend and stranger.

All peoples of the earth are God’s children.

We greet one another by name in Jesus’ name.

Together we extol the name of our God.

Open your hearts to receive new strength.

Open your lives to renewed understandings.

Surely God will equip us to face our world.

We will be ambassadors for God wherever we go.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 284**

“Blessed Quietness”

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

**We come together in this house of prayer, trusting you, O
God, to give us everything we need. As you provide for
the birds of the air, you supply life’s necessities for you
children to share. We choose to respond to your promises
by identifying ourselves as your servant people who seek
to be guided by your word. We gather to remember and
reclaim your covenant with us. Fleeing from tents of**

wickedness, we gather to do the tasks you entrust to us here, praying for strength to do our daily work as a ministry in your name. 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.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
Lord of heavenly forces!

² My very being longs, even yearns,
for the Lord's courtyards.

My heart and my body
will rejoice out loud to the living God!

³ Yes, the sparrow too has found a home there;
the swallow has found herself a nest
where she can lay her young beside your altars,
Lord of heavenly forces, my king, my God!

⁴ Those who live in your house are truly happy;
they praise you constantly.

⁵ Those who put their strength in you are truly happy;
pilgrimage is in their hearts.

⁶ As they pass through the Baca Valley,
they make it a spring of water.
Yes, the early rain covers it with blessings.

⁷ They go from strength to strength,
until they see the supreme God in Zion.

⁸ Lord God of heavenly forces,

hear my prayer;
listen closely, Jacob's God!

⁹ Look at our shield, God;
pay close attention to the face of your anointed one!

¹⁰ Better is a single day in your courtyards
than a thousand days anywhere else!

I would prefer to stand outside the entrance of my God's house than live comfortably in the tents of the wicked!

¹¹ The Lord is a sun and shield; God is favor and glory.
The Lord gives—doesn't withhold!—good things
to those who walk with integrity.

¹² Lord of heavenly forces,
those who trust in you are truly happy!

***GOSPEL: Mark 6:56-69**

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." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

⁶⁰ Many of his disciples who heard this said, "This message is harsh. Who can hear it?"

⁶¹ Jesus knew that the disciples were grumbling about this and he said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you were to see the Human One going up where he was before? ⁶³ The Spirit is the one who gives life and the flesh doesn't help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet some of you don't believe." Jesus knew from the beginning who wouldn't believe and the one who

would betray him. ⁶⁵ He said, “For this reason I said to you that none can come to me unless the Father enables them to do so.” ⁶⁶ At this, many of his disciples turned away and no longer accompanied him.

⁶⁷ Jesus asked the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?”

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered, “Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are God’s holy one.”

This the Word of God and can be trusted.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “A Stumbling Block for the Jews”

Today we conclude John’s narrative of the feeding of the multitude and the sermon on bread. Perhaps we should say sermons (plural), because Jesus as the Bread of Heaven is presented along two lines. Jesus is the Bread in the sense of being the Word proceeding from God, and the Bread in the sense of the Eucharist (communion) consumed by the believing community in whom he abides. *(I don’t think I have stressed that in the last few sermons. During Holy Communion you may hear the words “eat my bread and drink my blood” as a visual sign of our accepting the Christ into our bodies and into our hearts. We abide in him as he abides in us.)*

The message by Jesus was rejected by two groups: the Jews and many Christians which is not surprising. Just as we have problems with “eat my flesh, drink my blood” so did they. These words not only disturbed those in the audience committed to food laws that forbade eating human flesh and the blood of any living things, but also

many who were numbered among Jesus’ disciples. “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” they cried.

At this point we have to stop and take a step back to understand who was reading this text from the Gospel of John. This Gospel was written over 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus. The churches were in the early stages of development. This Gospel was written for one of those communities, the Johannine community. Apparently, the Johannine church, the congregation this Gospel was written for, took a position on the Eucharist not shared by all Christian groups.

It is unrealistic when reading the New Testament to think of only two groups, Jews and Christians. As Judaism contained different groups such as Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, so the early church consisted of communities that understood the gospel according to the traditions received, usually finding their identity in an apostle or other outstanding leader. *(Each early congregation probably had only one gospel to read. They did not have all 4 as we do.)*

At times this practice of each church identifying with a different person became divisive as we can read in 1 Corinthians 3. In the verses before us (60-66) we can observe the crumbling of a group referred to as “disciples”, some leaving because of theological dissent and one by betrayal (verses 64-66). The honesty of the passage in allowing us to see inside the church as well as inside the synagogue should relieve us of prejudging all Jews and idealizing all Christians.

A second stumbling block for the Jewish audience (and possibly some disciples) was Jesus’ refusal to accept the crowd’s confession of him as the promised one, the one like

Moses whom God would raise up. Some Christians would be content with that as a confession of faith, a way of saying that Jesus was the promised messiah. In fact, that was indeed preached in some quarters of the church (Acts 3:22-23). But for this Gospel, such an acknowledgement was not adequate. This is not to say that Jesus rejected outright the designation of “the prophet like Moses,” but rather that he is so much more than was expected.

We are back to a subject we have discussed before. What kind of king or messiah were the people looking for? Since Jesus didn't fit “their ideas”, many refused to believe Jesus was the one. Where a messiah was expected, the expectation tended to become defined not by what God would do for the people, but by what people wanted from God.

So even the category “messiah” can become corrupted to the point that a confession that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the one we have been waiting for, is inappropriate to Jesus' own understanding of himself and his mission. To say this is not to comment solely on Jesus' listeners in the synagogue at Capernaum but on ourselves as well.

I invite you to think about this. What would YOU expect from a Messiah? No pain, no accidents, no earthquakes, no wars? I think that comes under OUR part of the bargain (or covenant.) If the Messiah does not meet OUR expectations, do we walk away because this teaching is too hard? Amen.

***SPECIAL MUSIC: “Wonderful Words of Life” video**

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer.
Holy God, home of all who seek you: may you find in our hearts paths to walk, wandering with us through dark

valleys, dipping us in pools of living water, lifting our faces to the grace falling softly upon us.

Loving Lord, speaker of tough words: we would wish for an easy life as we follow you to our home. Help us to see that when we mop floors, we find our meaning; when we hammer nails, we discover our hope; when we embrace the sick, we touch our healing.

Spirit of Strength, bearer of our prayers, we would ask for: the strength to say 'yes' when 'no' is on our lips; the wisdom to welcome all into our hearts; the longing to be with you always.

Today we lift up the innocent people involved in the unrest in Afghanistan. So many countries have tried to help the innocent and all have failed. All we can do is pray that when the dust settles, that those in power will recognize their own people as part of them and try to build a better life for them.

We pray all these things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed 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.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 773

**Remember me, remember me,
O Jesus, remember me.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING:

The church is not a private club that we maintain for our own benefit. It is a mission outpost, constantly enlisting us and our resources for the spreading of good news and the increase of God's reign of love. Our offerings are one measure of how seriously we take our call as ambassadors for Christ.

OFFERTORY: "Meditation on 'Blessed Assurance'"

Stewart Landon

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done.
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION: May our giving add strength to the witness of your church as we humbly seek your truth and lovingly share it. Ready us to proclaim the gospel of peace in our homes, in our places of work and leisure, throughout our community and the world. Keep before your people the awesome mystery of faith. May its power overcome the cynicism of our skeptical, self-serving age, uniting us in disciples that are freeing and discipleship that is amazingly fulfilling. Amen**

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 573 "Lead On, O King Eternal"**

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

Take a prayerful spirit into your everyday world.
God will listen and respond to your prayers.

We pray for all God's saints engaged in ministry.

All of us are ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

You have good news to share with a needy world.

God will open up to you the mystery of the gospel.

We trust in God to lead and guide us in truth.

Happy is everyone who trusts in God.

Happy are those who look to God for strength.

All who dwell with God will go from strength to strength.

God grants abundant life to humble doorkeepers.

We will do our part to extend God's reign. Amen.

POSTLUDE: "Heaven Came Down Glory Filled My Soul"

John W. Peterson

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