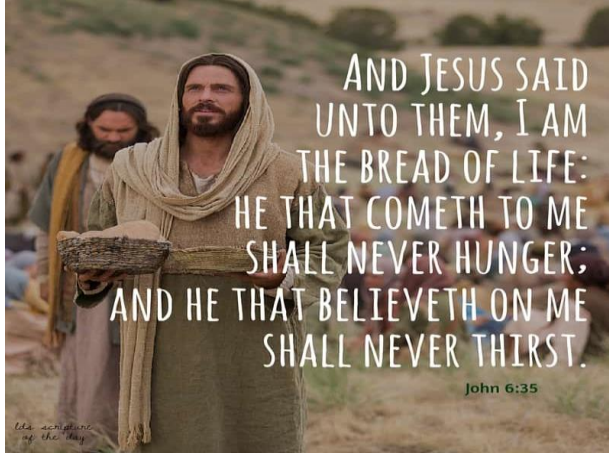


SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 2024 10 AM
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain
Organist – Sharon Banjavcic
Liturgy - Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay
Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

PRELUDE: “Look to the Savior” Bertha R. Frick

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Our Churches’ Wider Mission

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(INSPIRED BY PSALMS 34 AND 130:7)

One: Give praise to the Holy One at all times and bless his name.

Many: Hope in the Holy One! For with the Sovereign God, there is steadfast love and great power to redeem.

One: Let God’s radiance pour out upon you and make you shine brightly in the presence of the Most High.

Many: Hope in the Holy One! For with the Sovereign God, there is steadfast love and great power to redeem.

One: O experience and recognize the goodness of our God with all our senses and be glad in the safety of God.

Many: Hope in the Holy One! For with the Sovereign God, there is steadfast love and great power to redeem.

***INVOCATION:**

Everlasting God, we come before you at this moment in time. We bring the concerns of the day, the burdens of

our hearts, gratitude for your presence, and hope for the future. We gather as people in need and with abundance, in despair and with joy, in uncertainty and with confidence. We rest in the assurance that wherever we are on life's journey, you receive us with love, compassion, and acceptance. Embolden us to be as welcoming and hospitable to one another as we gather in your name, to hear your voice, and to give you praise. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 433 "In the Bulb There is a Flower"**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Redeemer, forgive us. We confess to our words and actions that grieve you. We speak words that divide and alienate rather than words that heal and invite dialogue. Help us to move past bitterness, anger, and resentment toward reconciliation, gratitude, and hope. Make us new not only for ourselves. Renew us for life in community with our neighbors, friends, and foes. Guide us in the path of life and love. Forgive and release us from the bonds of guilt and shame so that we can be free to change and grow, free to receive your power and new life, and free to be your agents of transformation in the world. Holy One, in your mercy, hear our plea. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Redeemed, the Holy One hears your cries and responds to your call. New life in Christ awaits you. Receive the redemptive power of the Spirit at work with you and through you to a world that can and will be redeemed and restored in the name of our Blessed God.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33
(from the Message)**

⁵ Then the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." The whole army heard what the king commanded the three captains regarding Absalom.

⁶⁻⁸ The army took the field to meet Israel. It turned out that the battle was joined in the Forest of Ephraim. The army of Israel was beaten badly there that day by David's men, a terrific slaughter—twenty thousand men! There was dazed and confused fighting all over the place—the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword!

⁹⁻¹⁰ Absalom ran into David's men, but was out in front of them riding his mule, when the mule ran under the

branches of a huge oak tree. Absalom's head was caught in the oak and he was left dangling between heaven and earth, the mule running right out from under him. A solitary soldier saw him and reported it to Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree!"

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Joab said, "I can't waste my time with you." He then grabbed three knives and stabbed Absalom in the heart while he was still alive in the tree; by then Absalom was surrounded by ten of Joab's armor bearers; they hacked away at him and killed him.

³¹ Then the Cushite arrived and said, "Good news, my master and king! God has given victory today over all those who rebelled against you!"

³² "But," said the king, "is the young man Absalom all right?" And the Cushite replied, "Would that all of the enemies of my master the king and all who maliciously rose against you end up like that young man."

³³ The king was stunned. Heartbroken, he went up to the room over the gate and wept. As he wept he cried out, O my son Absalom, my dear, dear son Absalom! Why not me rather than you, my death and not yours, O Absalom, my dear, dear son!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 130 Page 709

EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 4:25-5:2 Message from Paul

²⁵ Therefore, after you have gotten rid of lying, *Each of you must tell the truth to your neighbor* because we are parts of each other in the same body. ²⁶ *Be angry without sinning.* Don't let the sun set on your anger. ²⁷ Don't provide an opportunity for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves should no longer steal. Instead, they should go to work, using their hands to do good so that they will have something to share with whoever is in need.

²⁹ Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say. ³⁰ Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. ³² Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

⁵ Therefore, imitate God like dearly loved children. ² Live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. He was a sacrificial offering that smelled sweet to God.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 6:35-51**

³⁵ Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

³⁶ But I told you that you have seen me and still don't believe. ³⁷ Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and I won't send away anyone who comes to me. ³⁸ I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ This is the will of the one who sent me, that I won't lose anything he has given me, but I will raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ **This is my Father's will: that all who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**"

⁴¹ The Jewish opposition grumbled about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

⁴² They asked, "Isn't this Jesus, Joseph's son, whose mother and father we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

⁴³ Jesus responded, "Don't grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless they are drawn to me by the Father who sent me, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, *And they will all be taught by God.* Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God. He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I assure you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that whoever eats from it will never die. 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."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Level Two in Believing"

As a reminder for us all, I'd like to read the very beginning of the Gospel of John. John 1:1-5 It is entitled "**Story of the Word**"

1 In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

² The Word was with God in the beginning.

³ Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being

⁴ through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

This passage will help explain some of John:6.

The Gospel for today comes as an offer of a gift, an offer of bread from heaven that gives to the recipient life eternal. We began this theme two Sundays ago.

Without repeating the details that we already discussed, it is enough to recall here that we have referred to the feeding of the multitude as level one of the narrative and how the people understood what Jesus was saying. On this level the crowd lives, thinks, and acts. Even its talk of God, its immediate embrace of Jesus, its talk of signs and faith is willful, calculating, and self-serving. Even when the arena of action and conversation is religion instead of money or physical indulgence, we should not be blind to the fact that the motivational currents here all move toward self-interest.

No one in the crowd is talking commitment or discipleship; the entire focus is upon what God through Jesus can do for us. When the author of the Gospel of John talks of “the world,” nowhere does he deal with the usual popular images of getting rid of sin. On the contrary, he uses the world to describe religious practices, places rituals, traditions, and creeds that are perverted to self-interest. To Jesus’ listeners in John 6, bread was bread, not a sign of anything more or better. The next meal, not new life, was on their minds. Even so, to them Jesus still speaks of the true bread from heaven.

Here Jesus points his listeners beyond the meal of the evening before, beyond even the manna in the wilderness that their ancestors had eaten, to the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the

world. The listeners seem to have an appetite for this true bread that gives life UNTIL Jesus identifies himself as this Bread. At this they murmur, able to think of Jesus as being from Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, but certainly not from heaven. *(These comments are the same ones we heard weeks ago. “Who does he think he is?”)*

In what sense does the author of this Gospel want us to understand Jesus as the true bread from Heaven? At level one bread was bread; at level two the bread is the word of God; the words Jesus is telling the people in today’s passage. In verse 45 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 54:13 ⁴⁵ “It is written in the Prophets, And they *will all be taught by God*. Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me.” The word that reveals God is life-giving is found in Deuteronomy 8:3. “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that come from the mouth of the Lord.”

Such an interpretation of Jesus as the life-giving Word from heaven is not only congenial with this Gospel’s identification of Jesus as the Word, but with this Gospel’s theological assumption that the fundamental human appetite, the hunger beneath all hungers, is FOR A WORD FROM GOD. No one has even seen God; how

then will we know this God whom to know is life eternal? The only Son from the heart of the Father has revealed God. Jesus not only speaks the word that proceeds from the mouth of God; Jesus is the Word, the Bread which is more than bread, the manna that the people do not know.

There is no famine of the word of God, but at this point in the text the people remain hungry, having refused the Bread. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: “Whispering Hope” Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of all creation, Christ of human experience, Spirit of renewal and rest, we are thankful for all the people you send to minister to us. When we are depressed and ready to die, you send someone with a word of encouragement, or a gift of food or flowers, or an invitation that leads to a change of scene and an opportunity to recover and go on. When our chins are on our chests, you send someone with a loving touch to raise our eyes to you. Joy and thanksgiving break through the clouds like the sun after a storm. And we are grateful.

God of all nations, direct the leaders of nations large and small in the search for justice and peace. Remind those impatient to gain their political ends by violent means

that there is little to be gained by provocation rather than persuasion. Nothing is gained when the world is destroyed by war.

Here our prayers for those who suffer from unidentified illness, and from illnesses that, though diagnosed, are beyond our present knowledge to cure. Give assurance to all those who suffer that you have not forgotten them. We lift these prayers to you, Holy God, through your Son who taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy 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. 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: 775 “Eagle’s Wings”

**And God will raise you up on eagle’s wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of God’s hand.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Ephesians 4:25 reminds us that we are members of one another. That is true of the church, humanity, and all creation. The gifts we receive to sustain us have been

given for our common good. When one member lacks, we all lack. When one flourishes, we all share in the abundance. Let us give generously to ensure all needs are met, the Generous One is glorified.

OFFERTORY: "Jesus, Name Above All Names"
Naida Hearn

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION**
Holy God, thank you for the gift of generosity. Make us bold stewards of the resources you provide. Increase our offerings, expand our territory, and let our ministry testify to your goodness, nurture, and care for all.
Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 23**

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

***BENEDICTION:**

May you move forward from this time of worship assured of your redemption and empowered to be

agents of redemption.... transforming despair to hope, pain to joy, and endings to beginnings

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

POSTLUDE: "Jubilate Deo" Edward H. Wetherill

PRAYER LIST: