

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024 10 AM
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Communion Liturgy – B.J. Beu / Mary Scifres
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: “Fairest Lord Jesus” Jerry Ray

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Deaconess Parish Nurse Ministries

***RESPONDIVE CALL TO WORSHIP :**
(INSPIRED BY PSALM 15)

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Many: Those who want to journey with you, who may have missed a turn, and who may struggle with rocky patches and rough terrain.

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Many. Those who seek and search for you and for community with doubts and hopes, joys and fears, smiles and tears.

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Many: Those who try and those who sometimes give up. Those who are beautifully, wonderfully, and imperfectly human—all of us! Thanks be to God!

***INVOCATION:**

Loving God, we rejoice to be with you and with one another. You are the God who makes all things new and who redeems our past. In life, we find the fullness of

life—from joy beyond measure to despair that consumes. Your presence sustains us through the depths and the plateaus. We acknowledge your sovereignty and express our bold trust that hope is our portion and assigned position in your everlasting and incomparable realm. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: “I Will Enter His Gates”**

Sing along with video. Words also on screen.

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart:

I will enter His courts with praise.

I will say, “This is the day that the Lord has made!”

I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

He has made me glad. He has made me glad.

I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

He has made me glad. He has made me glad.

I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

(REPEAT)

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

Eternal God, may we break from the bonds of unaltered, unexamined, and unimaginative traditions. At the same time, may we be released from the compulsion to discount everything that has been a source of life and faithful formation across generations. Help us to discern what needs to be left in our past with honor, recognition, and gratitude, what needs to be eradicated with lament, repentance, and repair, and

what needs to be envisioned, imagined, and created for the future. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, the Holy One renews, redeems, and restores through continuing creative acts. God has not concluded the good work begun in you or in our faith communities. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we receive courage, counsel, and conviction to do the new thing God is calling us to do while holding fast to those things that build, sustain, and encourage.

***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: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9
(From The Message)**

THE WORDS OF MOSES

4¹⁻² Now listen, Israel, listen carefully to the rules and regulations that I am teaching you to follow so that you may live and enter and take possession of the land that God, the God-of-Your-Fathers, is giving to you. Don't add a word to what I command you, and don't remove a word from it. Keep the commands of God, your God, that I am commanding you.

⁵⁻⁶ Pay attention: I'm teaching you the rules and regulations that God commanded me, so that you may live by them in the land you are entering to take up ownership. Keep them. Practice them. You'll become wise and understanding. When people hear and see what's going on, they'll say, "What a great nation! So wise, so understanding! We've never seen anything like it."

⁷⁻⁸ Yes. What other great nation has gods that are intimate with them the way God, our God, is with us, always ready to listen to us? And what other great nation has rules and regulations as good and fair as this Revelation that I'm setting before you today?

⁹ Just make sure you stay alert. Keep close watch over yourselves. Don't forget anything of what you've seen. Don't let your heart wander off. Stay vigilant as long as you live. Teach what you've seen and heard to your children and grandchildren.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 15 Page 627

EPISTLE LESSON: James 1:17-27

¹⁷ Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth by his true word, and here is the result: we are like the first crop from the harvest of everything he created.

Welcoming and doing the word

¹⁹ Know this, my dear brothers and sisters: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry. ²⁰ This is because an angry person doesn't produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore, with humility, set aside all moral filth and the growth of wickedness, and welcome the word planted deep inside you—the very word that is able to save you.

²² You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. ²³ Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. ²⁴ They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do.

²⁶ If those who claim devotion to God don't control what they say, they mislead themselves. Their devotion is worthless. ²⁷ True devotion, the kind that is pure and faultless before God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficulties and to keep the world from contaminating us.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 7:1-8, 21-23**

What contaminates a life?

⁷ The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. ² They saw some of his disciples

eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. ³ The Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat without first washing their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. ⁴ Upon returning from the marketplace, they don't eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, "Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?"

⁶ He replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote,

*This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far away from me.*

⁷ *Their worship of me is empty
since they teach instructions that are human words.*

⁸ You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you."

¹⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

²¹ "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, ²² adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Missing the Point"

About this time of year some of our children or grandchildren off to college. The story is told about one particular college that was holding their freshmen orientation in an auditorium and the Dean was going over the rules of the campus such as where to park their bicycles or where the campus clinic is located if they feel ill.

Eventually the Dean got around to talking about the dormitories. At this particular college all the dorms were split into dorms for women and dorms for the male students. The Dean emphasized the repercussions if being caught in the wrong dormitory. "Gentlemen, if you get caught in a female dormitory at any time, you will be fined \$50. If you are caught a second time, you will be fined \$100, and if you are caught a third time, the fine is \$200." The Dean paused and asked if there were any questions. At the back of the auditorium, a small hand of a male student was raised. "Yes," the Dean

responded. “What is your question?” From the back came the voice of a male student, loud and clear. “Sir, how much is a season pass?”

I think the young man, missed the point of the Dean’s stern warnings.

Today’s Gospel lesson describes another example of missing the point. The Pharisees asked Jesus why the disciples did not wash their hands before eating? Jesus’ response was possibly the most revolutionary statements in the New Testament. Jesus had been arguing with the legal experts about different aspects of the traditional law. Jesus had shown the irrelevance of the elaborate handwashing rituals. He had shown how rigid adherence to the traditional law can actually mean disobedience to the law of God. But here he says something more startling yet.

Jesus declares that nothing that goes into a person can possibly cause defilement, for it is received only into the body, which rids itself of it in the normal physical way. No Jew ever believed that, and orthodox Jews do not believe it even now.

Jesus explains, “What makes someone unclean is what comes out of them. Evil intentions come from inside, out of people’s hearts – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, treachery, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, stupidity. These evil things all come from inside. They are what make someone unclean.”

The reason this discussion is important is this. Many Christians like us have grown up knowing that there is a long-standing debate in the Western churches about the relative place and value of “scripture” and “tradition”. The debate in the churches has usually been between Catholics who place a high value on tradition and Protestants who place a high value on scripture, often in relation to various practices of the church and to theological doctrines such as justification. That’s the sort of thing people often think of as soon as they hear a question raised about “scripture” and “tradition.”

The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees, however, was between two different ways of understanding what it means to be a good Jew in the first century. For centuries the Jews were taught to follow the Levitical laws. To be a good Jew, don’t break any of those rules. Jesus is bringing a different message, God’s truth. The charge Jesus levels against the Pharisees and legal experts is that, by teaching fundamental law what is in fact only human custom rather than divine revelation, they are guilty of hypocrisy, play-acting. They are claiming to be teachers of God’s truth and law; but in fact they are only teaching human traditions. The wider issue is “who speaks for God today? Who is offering a way of life which honors the God who spoke through scripture. Something Jesus assumes throughout.

Jesus was challenging, by his whole kingdom-movement the very basis on which the Pharisees had

built up their “structure of importance.” If the kingdom was indeed coming in the work Jesus was doing – by healing, by feasting with outcasts, by rolling back the kingdom of darkness – then the way that the layers of Pharisaic tradition had been pointing for long enough was quite simply ruled out from the start. Jesus’ argument for what he was doing was that it was the fulfillment of scripture. Go his way, and you got scripture thrown in. Go to Pharisees’ way, and scripture – supposedly the basis for tradition, but actually often undermined by it – would lose out.

What is the point of this discussion? Two things. What do we do in this sanctuary? Is it just “made up” rules and rituals? Let’s see. Communion? Nope it in the scriptures. Baptism? Nope it’s in the scriptures. Feeding the hungry? Nope, it’s in the scriptures. Caring for each other with calls, cards, and concerns? Nope. It’s in there. Giving offerings? Nope. It’s in there. In worship we read the scripture, pray, give thanks to God. I think Jesus did those things. If you think of others, let me know. I’ll look it up.

So, If you want to follow Jesus, read the scriptures to find out what he said, what he did, and what he will do for those he loves. Amen.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: 330

“Let Us Break Bread Together”

PASTORAL PRAYER: God of nature, God in history, God in the church, we give thanks to you for all that you have created for us to share in our world. We celebrate any victory accomplished in justice over oppression. Help us continue to make a just world for all.

As your Son Jesus came to us in great humility, so may your church serve you with the same mind, taking the form of servanthood and obedience.

We bring to you, gracious God, our thoughts and concerns. We worry about those around us. We worry about injustices we see. We worry about our country and the ground it is built on. We worry about climate change. We place all of these issues at your feet, loving God. If we can’t fix all our problems, we can certainly pray.

We pray for all those who are hurting, physically or emotionally. We pray for those who are searching for solutions for their pain or disease or illness. And we are extremely thankful when your servants in our medical professions, and mental health professions, and social services reach out to help those in need.

All these things we pray to you and to your Son Jesus 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: Three-fold Amen
Amen, Amen, Amen

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

James 1:17a reminds us that “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above.” May we receive all the gifts from God with gladness, share the gifts with hospitality and compassion, and celebrate the kingdom of God’s abundance with boldness.

***OFFERTORY: “Open Our Eyes That I May See”**
Clara H. Scott

***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

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Generous God, bless these gifts that we share for the flourishing of the kingdom. Prosper the work of our hands, order the steps in our days, and align the balance of our resources. In our time, talent, and treasure, may you be glorified. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

INVITATION: This is the table of grace.

In Holy Communion, manna in the wilderness becomes the bread of life.

In Holy Communion, the law of the Lord becomes the law of love.

In Holy Communion, the promise of eternity comes as mercy and grace.

In Holy Communion, Christ is with us in the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup.

Come to the table of grace.

Taste the promise of God.

Feast on the law of love.

Drink of living water that never ends.

The Lord is with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

Out of nothing, you created the wonders of our world; mighty mountains and quiet lakes, verdant meadows and raging streams.

Out of dust you formed us in your image, and breathed into us the breath of life.

When we wandered in the wilderness of life, you satisfied our hunger with manna from heaven, and quenched our thirst with water from a rock.

In the fullness of time, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, who became living bread and living water, to a woman at the well, and to all who accepted him into their hearts. Even when his disciples were about to fall away, Christ offered himself as the bread of heaven and the living waters of our salvation.

Even when we fall away today, Christ continues to be our bread of heaven and living water.

And so with your people on earth, and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn, saying;

(790)

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God most High.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is the bread of heaven, Christ Jesus. When you sent Christ to be with us, he offered his very self, that we might never hunger or thirst again.

Through Christ's body and cup of salvation, we are invited into your presence, rescued from our sins, and fed at your heavenly banquet.

With joy and gratitude, we remember that night, when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to

his disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is the bread of life, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

After supper, Jesus took the cup, blessed it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Drink from this, all of you. This is my life for the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these, your mighty acts of love and grace, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving. As your covenant people, and as reflections of your glory, in union with Christ's love for us, we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:

God of love, send your Holy Spirit upon us, that we might receive this bread and wine as the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation – gifts that well within us into springs of eternal life.

Tough these gifts of bread and wine with your Spirit, that they may bring nourishment to a world hungry for your hope and promise, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS:

Take and eat. This is the bread of life.

Take and drink. This is the cup of salvation.

Abide in Christ, and Christ will abide in you.

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

***PRAYER OF RESPONSE:**

God of abundant love, in your goodness and mercy,
nothing is lost.

As Jesus gathered the baskets of leftover food after
feeding the five thousand, gather our efforts to do your
will.

As Jesus gathered the hopes of the people looking for a
true king, gather our hopes and our dreams.

As Jesus gathered the least and the lost to a foretaste of
your heavenly banquet, gather us into the arms of your
mercy.

Gracious God, at all times and in all places, gather up the
fragments of our industry and service, that nothing may
be lost. And we are grateful. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 454 “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”**

***BENEDICTION:**

May the everlasting love of God give you peace,
The surprising grace of God give you courage,
And the creative will of God give you joy,
As you release the traditions that have served their time,
Hold the traditions that inspire new life,
And create traditions for a future promising and
unknown.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

POSTLUDE: “Finale” C.L. Koch

PRAYER LIST: