

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2024 10AM
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 618-397-6323
e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com
Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain
Organist /Pianist – Lisa Cleveland and Lynda Marshall
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:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Our Churches' Wider Mission

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(Inspired by Psalm 84)

One: O Holy one of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Many: We long to be in your beautiful assembly. Our hearts sing for joy!

One: O Holy one of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Many. You keep the sparrow and the spring. You sustain the splendor of creation. .

One: O Holy one of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Many: In you, we go from strength to strength. You hear our prayers, bestow blessings and honor, and withhold no good thing. Praise our God!

***INVOCATION:**

Lovely God, you abide with us. We acknowledge your presence among us with peace, trust, and thanksgiving.

It is good to be with you. It is good to be with one another. Fill us with your Spirit and revel in our worship. May this time give you honor and fortify us as your people, your ambassadors, and your agents of love and hope in the world. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 284 "Joys are Flowing Like a River**

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

Gracious and Holy God, speak to us. So often our prayer time is consumed by our words...when what we need most is your gentle nudges and your bold challenge. Let us hear from you. Prepare our hearts and minds to receive your wisdom, correction, and confirmation. Transform us for your glory, for our hope, and for the world. Amen. (Moment of silence.)

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, even when God seems silent, God is still speaking, listening, and moving in our lives. Know that every moment of attention we center upon the Holy One is faithful stewardship of our time. God, the Redeemer, will honor our seeking, trusting, and listening with blessing, hope, and grace.

***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 LESSONS: 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43
(from the Message)**

8¹⁻² Bringing all this to a climax, King Solomon called in the leaders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the family patriarchs, to bring up the Chest of the Covenant of God from Zion, the City of David. And they came, all Israel before King Solomon in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month, for the great autumn festival.

6-9 Then the priests brought the Chest of the Covenant of God to its place in the Inner Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, under the wings of the cherubim. The outspread wings of the cherubim stretched over the Chest and its poles. The poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the entrance to the Inner Sanctuary, but were not noticeable farther out. They're still there today. There was nothing in the Chest but the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb where God made a covenant with Israel after bringing them up from Egypt.

The Temple Finished, Dedicated, Filled

¹⁰⁻¹¹ When the priests left the Holy Place, a cloud filled The Temple of God. The priests couldn't carry out their priestly duties because of the cloud—the glory of God filled The Temple of God!

²²⁻²⁵ Before the entire congregation of Israel, Solomon took a position before the Altar, spread his hands out before heaven, and prayed,
O God, God of Israel, there is no God like you in the skies above or on the earth below who unswervingly keeps covenant with his servants and relentlessly loves them as they sincerely live in obedience to your way. You kept your word to David my father, your personal word. You did exactly what you promised—every detail. The proof is before us today!

Keep it up, God, O God of Israel! Continue to keep the promises you made to David my father when you said, “You'll always have a descendant to represent my rule on Israel's throne, on the condition that your sons are as careful to live obediently in my presence as you have.”

²⁶ O God of Israel, let this all happen;
confirm and establish it!

²⁷⁻³² Can it be that God will actually move into our neighborhood? Why, the cosmos itself isn't large enough to give you breathing room, let alone this Temple I've built. Even so, I'm bold to ask: Pay attention to these my prayers, both intercessory and personal, O God, my God.

Listen to my prayers, energetic and devout, that I'm setting before you right now. Keep your eyes open to this Temple night and day, this place of which you said, “My Name will be honored there,” and listen to the prayers that I pray at this place.

Listen from your home in heaven
and when you hear, forgive.

When someone hurts a neighbor and promises to make things right, and then comes and repeats the promise before your Altar in this Temple, listen from heaven and act accordingly: Judge your servants, making the offender pay for his offense and setting the offended free of any charges.

⁴¹⁻⁴³ And don't forget the foreigner who is not a member of your people Israel but has come from a far country because of your reputation. People *are* going to be attracted here by your great reputation, your wonder-working power, who come to pray at this Temple.

Listen from your home in heaven.

Honor the prayers of the foreigner so that people all over the world will know who you are and what you're like and will live in reverent obedience before you, just as your own people Israel do; so they'll know that you personally make this Temple that I've built what it is.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 84 Page 675

EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 6:10-20

Put on the armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. ¹¹ Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. ¹² We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. ¹³ Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. ¹⁴ So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, ¹⁵ and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. ¹⁶ Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word.

¹⁸ Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers. ¹⁹ As for me, pray that when I open my mouth, I'll get a message that confidently makes this secret plan^[a] of the gospel known. ²⁰ I'm an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel. Pray so that the Lord will give me the confidence to say what I have to say.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 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."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Do you believe or are you offended?”

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.

The sermon by Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum (verse 59) is rejected by two groups: the Jews and many of his followers, plus Christians in our world. That the former group did not accept Jesus’ message is not surprising, given the “Jesus versus Jews” perspective of most of this Gospel. This viewpoint reflects a time and place in which the author of this Gospel was much involved in church-synagogue tensions (see chapter 15:21-16:4). Our responsibility to this text demands, however, that we not assume uncritically that tension and generalize on it but rather examine the grounds for the Jews’ rejection of Jesus’ sermon.

No doubt one point of offense was the language “eat my flesh, drink my blood’. We talked about that last Sunday. Those words can make many of us feel very

uncomfortable. When Jesus first said those words they not only disturbed those in his audience committed to food laws that forbade eating human flesh and the blood of any living thing, but also many who were numbered among Jesus’ disciples. “The teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” (verse 60). 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. (Just think of the half dozen church steeples even in small towns that we see today.)

At times this practice became division which we can read about in 1 Corinthians 3. In the verses before us (vv. 60-66) we can observe the crumbling of a group referred to as “disciples,” some leaving because of theological dissent and one by betrayal (vv. 64-66). The honesty of this passage in allowing us to see inside the church as well as inside the synagogue should relieve us of prejudging all Jews and idealizing some Christians and criticizing other Christian denominations who have different beliefs than we do.

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 us. You may remember back in week one of this discussion, that the crowds who were miraculously fed by Jesus wanted to proclaim Jesus as successor to Moses. They wanted to control what was happening and make Jesus king (verse 14). Some Christians would be content with that as a confession of faith, a way of saying that Jesus was the promised messiah. In fact, this was indeed preached in some quarters of the church in 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 much more than was expected. Where a messiah was expected, the expectation tended to become defined not by what God would do for the people but what people wanted from God. You might remember when we had that discussion in week one. “When the messiah comes” is an expression that may unleash a shopping list of the things we desire. What do you think? It’s almost like children making a list of toys they want from Santa Claus.

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.

John Chapter 6 elaborates on a theme running through the entire Gospel; the fundamental offense in the words and work of Jesus is the offense of grace. It is sometimes stated gently: we have life from the bread that God gives. It is sometimes stated bluntly, so as to offend all our claims of free will and self determination: no one can come to me unless that person has been drawn of God (verses 17-40).

This is truly the hard saying, but the issue is clear. Do **we** preside over life, demanding that Jesus do as Moses did, calling for signs as proof so **we** can decide **whether or not to believe**, electing Jesus king by our acclamation? Or do we accept the gift from heaven? The bread in the wilderness was a gift: the bread as the word from heaven was and is a gift; the bread of the Eucharist is a gift. Take, eat, and live.

For all who do not walk away, Simon Peter speaks; “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know you are the Holy One of God.” (verses 68-69).

Because you are sitting here in the pews, or reading this, you have made your decision. Amen.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: 473 “Blessed Assurance”

PASTORAL PRAYER:

We are here, Holy One. Even though some of the teaching by your Son, Jesus, is hard to understand, we are here to listen to him. It may take us awhile to be comfortable with what he says, but we remain. Thank you, Gracious One, for sending Jesus to us.

We are here to praise you, God, and celebrate what You have done for us and for what you have promised us.

We know you keep your promises, but time and place is up to you. Ours is not to know your time. And it is not our place to act like we are in charge.

We are here to remember all those who suffer from need of food, water, shelter, and peace away from violence.

We are here to pray for those who struggle with their health, physical or mental. We pray for those who are in pain, those who are lonely, those who grieve, and those on our prayer list.

We are here to say thank you to you, most Holy One, and to ask that your Holy Spirit remain with us while we are here, and when the Spirit is with us every day.

We are here to pray together the words your Son taught us, . . .

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: 769 "Hear our Prayer"

**Hear our prayer, God, hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Ephesians 6 encourages us to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand." (vv. 10-11) Let us stand against the powers of evil that would create barriers to our compassion and generosity to meeting the needs of our community. Let us stand against the powers that would convince us that we lack time to love and serve God with the talents, skills, and passions endowed to us by Creator. Let us stand in solidarity and perseverance with the Living God who gives generously, lovingly, and abundantly.

OFFERTORY: "I Need Thee Every Hour"***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 THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

Strong and Giving God, receive our gifts of time, talent, and financial resources for the building of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. May we give with a spirit of courage, trust, and empathy. May our faithful stewardship receive confirmation through changed lives and renewed communities for your glory. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 573 “Lead On, Eternal Sovereign”**

***BENEDICTION:**

Go in peace, Holding onto steadfast hope in a God who does good things who calls us as ambassadors and witnesses to the kingdom who sustains and supplies us whose work is done through our hands, our voice, and our lives and who remains with us now and forever.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

THE BELL IS RUNG

POSTLUDE: “O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”