

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

August 1, 2021

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

PRELUDE “*Bread of the World*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Praise be to God, who reigns above the heavens.

Praise be to God, who dwells within our hearts.

Let the majesty of creation worship in reverence.

Let each man, woman and child pray in faith.

All: **Praise be to God.**

(Maren C. Tirabassi, *Touch Holiness*)

HYMN No. 59 “*I Sing the Mighty Power of God*”

I sing the mighty pow’r of God, That made the mountains rise;

That spread the flowing seas abroad, And built the lofty skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordained The sun to rule the day;

The moon shines full at His command, And all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, That filled the earth with food;

He formed the creatures with His word, And then pronounced them good.

Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, Where’er I turn my eye;

If I survey the ground I tread, Or gaze upon the sky!

There’s not a plant or flow’r below, But makes Thy glories known;

And clouds arise, and tempests blow, By order from Thy throne;

While all that borrows life from Thee Is ever in Thy care,

And everywhere that we can be, Thou, God, art present there.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Lord, the eyes of all look to You in hope; and You give them what they need. You open Your hand and satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. We, too, turn to You again, longing to be filled— to eat of the Bread of Life, to drink from Your life-giving streams, to taste Your goodness and live. May the time we spend together in Your presence nourish our hearts and minds; may it strengthen our relationship with You, and renew our commitment to live in this world as Your faithful disciples. For You alone are God, the Source and Sustainer of life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

(Christine Longhurst, re:Worship)

SCRIPTURE READING John 6:1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus said, “Make the

people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

SERMON

Ben tells me that eleven miles of the road up the North Fork is closed to non-residential traffic. Concerns about falling debris and keeping the road open for fire equipment and emergency access, I assume. I’m not sure what that means to those of you who have places up there. And I’m not even sure how many of you have what kind of places. Cabins, trailers, favorite spots to put in and float the river, picnic tables, camping sites, dormant fire rings. Clearly, it’s a favorite spot to get away and to gather, to put your feet up and your fishing pole in. And like far too many places and activities this season, it’s compromised at best; cloaked in smoke and invaded by restrictions, it just isn’t what you want and need it to be.

Imagine that you and your family were headed there for an overnight. It’s been a long, exhausting week and you just need to get away. Maybe you should find another destination, but you’ve got company from out of town, and he’d like to go back to the river. You can handle that part; what’s difficult is that your friend is a people magnet; and everybody wants a part of him. He has a gift for making himself available to people, seems to always find just the right words, overflows with wisdom and is able to heal bodies and souls like nothing you’ve ever seen before. All week, every time you’ve turned around, there have been more people pushing in, trying to get close, straining to hear, hoping for a chance to shake his hand and ask for help. And now, as you want nothing more than to block the road and slip in past the “Closed” sign, you pull into your spot on the river, and give in to the truth that you’re not alone. You’ve been followed. And not just by a few, but by the droves. And they just keep coming. Places to park filled up long ago, but that doesn’t stop anybody. They just keep coming; walking, filling in every space, jostling to the side to make room for a few more. Dozens of them; no hundreds; before it’s over, actually probably thousands. I expect the fatigue and craving to be left alone washes over you first, mixed with the stress of smoke and fire restrictions. There’s really no need to worry about how to tend to them, because you simply can’t. They got themselves in here; they can get themselves out again. All you have to do is endure. Not that you know how you’re going to do that, but it is what it is.

What if, in that moment, facing that crowd, at the end of that week, out in the middle of nowhere, your friend pulled you aside and asked what you were going to serve these folks for dinner? How would you respond?

Some would throw their friend to the wolves. Or you could look for a hiding place, but there isn’t likely to be one that would really hide you, nor any safe place to sit back and watch the show. If you could figure out a way to get out, you could try leaving. Who cares if the way out is blocked by the

throng of folks who followed you in. Just slip out and make your escape as fast as you can! I suppose the more argumentative among us might push back and say, are you nuts? Did you see a grocery store on the way in? A McDonald's? Notice that the Snake Pit already has a line out the door? Even if we could make our way out to Walmart, we'd have to wipe them out of groceries and overflow the available credit on our cards; how would we get supplies back here, and where would we prepare a meal or even pretend to cook? It simply isn't possible. Send them away! What are the chances you'd look at your own cooler? Remember the handful of sandwiches in there, the couple of fish, and bring them out as a token to start with? Or keep them for yourselves – and later, protesting that the sight of them in front of these hordes would be like waving a red flag in front of a bull, certain to do way more harm than good?

More than likely, this is not a situation that any of us will ever be confronted with, or even a what-if that seems real enough to get worked up about. But it was real for Jesus and his followers, or at least real enough that all 4 of the Gospel writers tell us about it (this is the only miracle story all of them tell). One of the pieces of the story unique to John is the opening sentence: Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberius. This is the only place in scripture where it's called the Sea of Tiberius, which is its Roman name, and points not so subtly toward the tension that Jesus and his followers could feel on that mountain. The Passover was near, and the gathered crowd was just as passionate about their imperial bondage as their liberation from physical ailments. Fire was hovering as close for Jesus and his friends as it is for you; just a different kind of fire.

With that as a backdrop, surrounded by 5,000 people who were famished in body as well as spirit, Jesus turned to Philip and asked where they were going to buy bread for the masses. To which Philip protested incredulously: are you kidding? Six months wages wouldn't buy enough for each of them to even get a little! While he was shielding his own wallet and protecting whatever amount of cash he had there, Andrew ushered a little boy forward to Jesus, a child who hadn't gotten the memo about the inadequacy of limited resources in the face of excessive need. Andrew said, there's a boy here who brought his lunch, five barley loaves and two dried fish; totally meaningless among so many people, but he's willing to share. Which is when Jesus instructed the people to sit down. He took the loaves, gave thanks for the gift, blessed and broke them, and then gave them to those who were seated all around him; and he did the same with the fish. As much as anyone wanted. And when all were satisfied, the disciples gathered up the leftovers, finding sufficient fragments and crumbs to fill twelve baskets.

One of the other pieces of this story that is unique to John is the part where Jesus distributes the food among the people. In the other gospels, he turns to the disciples and says, you give them something to eat. But here, in John, he feeds them. Now, I don't know how that worked or how long it took anymore than I know how five barley loaves and two dried fish satisfied the hunger of 5,000 people. What I do know is the powerful imagery in that statement, the face to face encounter, the connection Jesus offered the men, women and children who flocked around him on that hillside. He didn't just give them a morsel of bread and fish; he didn't toss them into the crowd and hope everyone would grab a piece before it landed; he offered himself. To each of them.

Something like 30 years ago, when I was serving on the Conference staff in Minnesota, I had an amazing conversation with a member of our Conference board. He was a retired farmer, a lifelong church person who had spent years and hours in who knows how many worship services, committee meetings and volunteer projects. He came to me after a worship service where we had served communion to hundreds of people. We split up in pairs and found a place to stand, and then people stepped into the line closest to them. He was in the line where I was holding the bread, and when he reached me, I said, Paul, the body of Christ broken for you. That's it. Nothing fancy or profound; just his name and the words we always say. When he found me later, he had tears in his eyes, and talked about how powerful it had been to hear his own name spoken as he received the bread, something he'd

never heard before. I've always believed that in some mysterious way, he encountered Jesus as he received that bread, because he was named and known as a beloved disciple, and not just another face in the crowd.

In ways I'll never understand and don't need to diagram, Jesus served those thousands on that mountain with bread and fish; he met them in their longing and their hunger, filled them up and satisfied them, sharing bread, fish and himself with them. But apparently, the smoke hadn't cleared; the tension hadn't resolved. And so the energy in the crowd began to turn: the people began to recognize Jesus as a prophet, and began to move on him in order to make him their king. Just what Rome was afraid of, and absolutely what Jesus wanted no part of. So he slipped away by himself.

As evening approaches and darkness settles in, the disciples grow restless and finally get in their boat and head back out across the sea. Except that the darkness that engulfed the disciples isn't just about the hour of the day. As it always is in the Gospel of John, it's also about turmoil and trouble, lack of faith and an abundance of fear. It's about the absence of Jesus and not knowing where they should turn or what they should do. It's about not knowing what they signed up for and whether they can stick with it. And so they rowed for just about forever, when they were in the middle of the sea, they finally began to see a shape appear out of the middle of nowhere. Strikingly, in John's story, Jesus doesn't calm the sea; he calms the disciples' terror.

Matthew Myer Boulton ties the pieces together with these words: "Sure enough, the disciples (including us!) are center stage in this story. Jesus' initial question to Philip — "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" — frames the whole episode as part of the disciples' ongoing education (and ours), and at key points in the narrative, it's their skepticism that serves as the foil for Jesus' gracious action. The disciples doubt, thinking in terms of scarcity; and yet Jesus provides. The disciples flee under the cover of night; and yet Jesus pursues them and stays with them through the chaos. The disciples are anxious and afraid — and so are many of us today, for reasons great and small. The good news of the Gospel is that God, the good shepherd, provides for our needs with enough and more than enough — and in doing so, frees us up to care for our neighbors." (*Enough*, SALTproject.org)

Jesus comes to us and meets us, feeds us and fills us, in ways that we will never understand and in ways that will change us forever. Jesus meets us in the storm and the smoke, in the virus and the drought, and fills us up, calls us forward, and asks us to trust. To believe. To receive in his life and his love, his presence and his grace, the bread of life that will never disappoint and will always see us through. Amen.

HYMN No. 274 "Break Thou the Bread of Life" (vs 1-3)

Break Thou the bread of life, Dear Lord, to me, As Thou didst break the loaves Beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page, I see Thee, Lord, My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word.

Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, To me, to me, As Thou didst bless the bread By Galilee;
Then shall all bondage cease, All fetters fall; And I shall find my peace, My All in all.

Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me, Thy holy Word the truth That saveth me;
Give me to eat and live With Thee above; Teach me to love Thy truth, For Thou art love.

PRAYER REQUESTS

-The residents and staff at Good Sam as they continue to battle Covid, and grieve the loss of 3 residents
-I know of two households in our midst for whom the wildfires are breathing down their necks and fire equipment is actively using the roads past their homes. I wonder if others of us are as personally affected

PASTORAL PRAYER

Take our hands, God, not to lift us out of the world, but to lead us through it as a mother fondly leads her son and a father his daughter. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Take from us the worn clothes of adulthood and dress us up like children, so that we can dream and imagine and play again without fear or contradiction. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Speak to us in the silence we learn to cherish, and let our conversation with you move from formality to friendliness, until all of life and all of us become open to your Spirit. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Graciously treasure us, God, as a lover embraces the beloved. Reveal to us in fond intimacy all that you wish us to receive from you and all you wish to receive from us. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Give us a deep cherishing where we have had our fill of shallow pleasures; give us affection for ourselves where we have neglected the beauty that you planted in us; give us love for you, especially if respect is all we usually offer. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

And this day, to those who are anxious bring calm, and enliven those impaired by apathy. To the sick in body, mind and spirit, bring healing, and to their caregivers, bring skill and sensitivity. To the abused, bring safe affection, and send an angel to forestall their abusers. To the war-torn and oppressed, bring the dawn of a different day, and to those who wield power, give the wisdom to use it wisely. And now we put into your hands, which cradle creation, our souls, our bodies, our hopes, our fears, our past and our future; for you alone are God, from whom all goodness comes, and through whom all life is made new. *(A Wee Worship Book, Fifth Incarnation, Wild Good Goose Worship Group)*

Hear us as we join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." As we have been granted great abundance, let us offer up those blessings in God's name.

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

On my own what I have to give doesn't amount to much in the light of all you have given to me and in the face of so much need. Put together as a congregation, what we offer you here in love becomes more, not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. We ask you to bless our gifts and with the addition of your blessing, just as it was with the loaves and fishes, there is enough for all. Amen

(Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand website. <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/>)

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

A follower of Jesus once wrote: "Think what kind of people you are whom God has called: not many wise by human standards, not many powerful or of noble birth. Yet to shame the wise, God has chosen what the world counts foolish; and to shame the strong, God has chosen what the world counts weak."

It is not for our virtue that we are here. It is not for who we are that we are called to this table. It is only for one reason – that God wants us.

So come, leaving behind the baggage of your self-importance or the burden of your self-loathing. How you feel, who are you, what you have done, at this moment does not matter. There is a greater cause, there is a stronger voice. It belongs to Jesus, who, in bread and cup, says, "I am here... for you."

Communion Prayer

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to praise you, for you are the One from whom we come and the One to whom we will return.

You conceived the universe, wove the world together and hold all life in your hand.

You watch us waking or sleeping, you keep every tear that we shed, you hear every prayer that we make, you know both our best and our worst and you will not let us go.

So, with rain, wind and sunshine, with all that moves in time with its Maker, we praise you.

With angels and archangels, with the saints from long ago, with our loves ones who are gathered round your heavenly table, we praise you.

With the church throughout the world, Orthodox and Lutheran, Catholic and Reformed, with all who love Jesus and honor his name, we praise you, singing the hymn of your everlasting glory.

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!

Yes, blessed is he... who was born among us incognito, who grew up without privilege or status, who walked the way to heaven through the back streets of this world, who told the deepest truths in ordinary language, who touched and healed, blessed and disturbed without fear or favor, who showed inclusive love in all is unconditional glory; who, for all this, was crucified, died and was buried; who, for all this and for all of us, rose again; who, though high in heaven, is present with us here and now.

Blessed is he in all his love and beauty. God beyond holiness, as we do what Jesus once did, let your Spirit move among us to settle on this bread and this cup, that they may become for us the body and blood of Christ.

And let that same Spirit stir our souls so that as we share this sacrament, we may recognize our Lord and receive him, that he may be in us and we in him for ever. **Amen.**

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup

Among friends, gathered round a table, Jesus took bread; and when he had blessed it, he broke it and said: "Take this, and eat it. It is my body. It is given for you. Do this to remember me."

Then later, during the meal, he took a cup of wine, and when he had given thanks, he said: "In this cup is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Take this, all of you, to remember me."

All who hunger and thirst for a better life, for a deeper faith, for a better world: here is the bread of life, feed on it with gratitude; here is the cup of salvation, drink from it and believe. The gifts of God for the people of God. *(A Wee Worship Book, Fifth Incarnation, Wild Good Resource Group)*

Sharing the Bread and Cup

Take and eat: the body of Christ broken for you.

Take and drink: the blood of Christ poured out for you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

O Brother Jesus, we have been guests at your table; come with us wherever we go and be present in all we share. Summon out in us, whom you have fed, generosity of spirit to ensure that all the hungry are nourished and earth's barren places are fertile with food, faith, hope and love. Amen.

HYMN No. 435 "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

What a Friend we have in Jesus; All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our Refuge – Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.

In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.

BENEDICTION

The grace of God, deeper than our imagination;

the strength of Christ, stronger than our need;

and the communion of the Holy Spirit, richer than our togetherness;

guide and sustain us today and in all our tomorrows. Amen.