

Sermon and Prayers
12th Sunday after Pentecost, August 15, 2021
Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Prayer of the Day

Ever-loving God, your Son gives himself as living bread for the life of the world. Fill us with such a knowledge of his presence that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life to serve you continually, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Proverbs 9:1-6

- ¹Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
²She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
³She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
⁴“You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
⁵“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”

John 6:51-58

[Jesus said,] ⁵¹“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, from God our Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

And from your siblings in Christ who are spread across the mission territory of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, greetings and woo-hoo in the name of Jesus.

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One of my favorite memories from my teenaged years is coming home from a long day at school followed by baseball or basketball practice, stepping through the side entrance of the house, which opened to the kitchen and kitchen table, and being greeted by the aroma of fresh-baked bread or cinnamon rolls and my aproned mother's warm welcome-home.

Exhausted and hungry, as I crossed the threshold into her kitchen, I knew – regardless of what had happened or what I had done during the day – I knew again that I was a part of my mother and of the family that her love and bread fed. As I sat at the table or, more often, leaned on a counter, nibbling on a bit of bread and basking in her attention as I told her about my day, I was being renewed and refreshed and made ready for another day, whatever challenges it might hold.

Wisdom has built her house...She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, and she has set her table...To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

And Jesus said:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh...Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

God has built a house for us. In Christ aproned in our humanity to be crucified and risen, God provides life-giving bread and soul-healing wine and sets a table for us that overflows with forgiveness and hope, healing and welcome and persistent, unfailing, unfaltering love, the very essence of life.

God's Spirit moves through the world, seeps into our days, wafts through the air like the aroma of fresh-baked bread, beckoning us to come in – every one of us, even and especially when we have been foolish or unfaithful, when we are hungry or thirsty, battered or beaten down.

"Come in, whoever you are, wherever you have been. Sit at the table together. Eat and drink and tell me your tales. For those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them...and you will have life."

Of course, the pandemic has challenged and changed the ways in which we had become accustomed to sitting at table together...and it continues to. It has been hard to not be able to be in-person with one another and, when we are, to still maintain distance and covered faces.

We can't smell fresh bread over Zoom. And, oh how we miss the welcoming warmth of human touch.

But we have learned along the way that God is able to set tables for us and feed us in a wide variety of ways and through many means. After all, if a stone-closed tomb could not keep the crucified and risen Christ from us, and if the peace-breathing presence of the risen Christ can appear in a room with doors locked tight by fear, then surely the life-giving bread that is Jesus can cross over technology, space, and distance to feed us.

It just might not look or sound the same as what we had come to expect. That's the way it was for our forebears in faith as they made their way through the wilderness. Exodus 16:13-16 tells the story this way:

... and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. Then the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

God set a table of sustaining nourishment for them, and they didn't recognize what it was...until Moses pointed it out!

And remember, even Mary did not recognize the risen Jesus when he stood right in front of her in the garden...until he spoke her name!

If we were in the power of the Spirit to "lay aside immaturity," as the Proverb put it, if we were to allow faith to overcome our skepticism or belligerence or rigid expectations – or whatever else clogs our nose – where in our daily lives might we catch an unexpected whiff of the sweet aroma of the bread of life offered for us?

Might it be in an online connection with an old friend, through worship online, in-person or some kind of hybrid, prepackaged communion elements, a quiet moment alone, time with scripture, slipping on a mask in care for others, a time of prayer, an evening walk or morning workout, a meal shared with loved ones...?

As ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton put it recently, to look for and heed the invitation to eat and live is "...the faith which declares that through pandemics, droughts, floods, famine, deadly bigotry, war, all the death-dealing things in nature and the human heart, life – the abundant life that Jesus promises – will prevail."¹

Dear cross-marked, Spirit-sealed child of God, in the crucified and risen Christ Wisdom has built the house. Jesus has offered his body and mixed the wine on the cross and set the table when he rose from the grave. The sweet aroma of fresh baked bread and just poured wine of new, abundant and lasting life waft all around us and the crucified and risen one calls out with warm welcome, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside whatever is keeping you from me and live. For whoever eats will live because of me and you will abide in me and I in you."

Thanks be to God. Amen

¹ Living Lutheran Twitter feed, August 6, 2021.

Prayers of Intercession

Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

God of wisdom, enlighten your church. Guide theologians, biblical scholars, authors, and seminary professors as they seek greater knowledge and invite others into deeper understanding. Teach us to ask faithful questions and open our minds to new ideas. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of creation, mend the earth. Cool warming oceans and preserve melting ice caps. Increase our awareness of changing climate patterns and reveal new approaches to the ecological challenges we face. Shield those in the path of hurricanes or tropical storms. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of all nations, direct our leaders. Grant them courage to lay aside political grudges and renew their determination to address difficult conflicts. Guide them in the work of reconciliation. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of compassion, tend to the wounded. Rescue those tormented by mental illness or mired in addiction. Ease the anxiety of those struggling with dementia. Come quickly to help all who are grieving and all those who suffer, especially those we name or bring to mind now. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of beauty, inspire artists. Bless those whose visual and musical gifts enliven our life together. Bless the creative work of poets, hymnwriters, composers, painters, sculptors, and others that enrich our worship and daily life. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of resurrection, bring us to new life. Give us the living bread from heaven through which we abide in your love. Open our hearts to see and receive, taste and share this bread in the midst of our daily lives. On the last day raise us with all the saints to eternal life. God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

[Prayer of the Day and Prayers of Intercession adapted from SundaysandSeasons.com]