

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 2, 2020
Living Faith Lutheran Church, Sechelt, BC

As the practice has been for the past months, online worshippers are invited to prepare bread and wine beforehand, ready to be consecrated and shared at the appropriate time. Those preferring to participate in the livestreaming of the liturgy may do so by clicking on the link to our parish website where the service will be posted for viewing at 9.15 a.m. today (August 2) or anytime in the days thereafter. That link is: livingfaithlutheran.weebly.com/worship

Preservice Music

GATHERING

Gathering Song #531 “The Trumpets Sound, the Angels Sing”

1. The trumpets sound, the angels sing, the feast is ready to begin.
The gates of heav’n are open wide, and Jesus welcomes you inside.

Refrain: *Sing with thankfulness songs of pure delight.
Come and revel in heaven’s love and light.
Take your place at the table of the King.
The feast is ready to begin, the feast is ready to begin.*

2. Tables are laden with good things; oh, taste the peace and joy he brings.
He’ll fill you up with love divine, he’ll turn your water into wine. *Refrain.*
3. The hungry heart he satisfies, offers the poor his paradise.
Now hear all heav’n and earth applaud the amazing goodness of the Lord. *Refrain.*

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit be with us all and be with us always. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Glorious God, your generosity waters the world with goodness, and you cover creation with abundance. Awaken in us a hunger for the food that satisfies both body and spirit, and with this food fill all the starving world, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

WORD

First Reading Genesis 32:22-31 *Today’s lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures follows the semincontinuous readings from Genesis, telling the ancient stories of God’s people on their journey to and their presence in the land promised to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants.*

²²The same night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Word of God. Word of Life. Thanks be to God

Second Reading Romans 9:1-5 *This continues our reading through the most significant of St. Paul's writings, his letter to the Christians in Rome, in which he lays out the most essential teachings of the faith given to him by the Holy Spirit and passed on to us for our instruction and growth, especially concerning the fundamental roles of God's grace and our response of faith (or trust) in and to that grace.*

¹I am speaking the truth in Christ — I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit — ²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Word of God. Word of Life. Thanks be to God.

Lesson Hymn #506 "The Word of God is Source and Seed"

1. The Word of God is source and seed; it comes to die and sprout and grow.
So make your dark earth welcome warm; root deep the grain God bent to sow.

Refrain: In the Lord let us rejoice, in the Lord let us rejoice, in the Lord let us rejoice!

2. The Word of God is breath and life; it comes to heal and wake and save.
So let the Spirit touch and mind and rouse your dry bones from their grave.

Refrain: Gaudeamus, Domino, gaudeamus Domino, gaudeamus Domino!

3. The Word of God is flesh and grace, who comes to sing, to laugh and cry.
So dare to be as Jesus was, who came to live and love and die. *Refrain.*

In keeping with this year's focus on Matthew, we explore the understanding of Jesus as Teacher, Healer and the "New Israel" whose life, ministry, passion, death and resurrection not only fulfill the ancient prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures about the Messiah (Promised or Anointed One) but expand and extend the understanding of him as Saviour and Redeemer who, by his actions, brings into being the reign of God which Matthew calls the "Kingdom of Heaven"

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Pentecost 9a, August 2, 2020 Matthew 14:13-21

LFLLC

Having received news of the death of John the Baptist,
and knowing that God's prophets were more likely to die
violently than quietly and sooner rather than later,
perhaps Jesus thought that it would be wise to flee to a remote place.
Perhaps. No one knows for sure.

But we can be sure that Jesus' heart must have been broken
by John's murder carried to please a dancing girl.
And as a crowd began to gather, it seemed clear
that they had heard the same news and felt the same.

And maybe that is why they came to that lonely place where Jesus was—
to draw strength and consolation from being together,
to look to Jesus for a word of hope and,
as yet unknown to them, to share a meal together.
As someone put it: "Sometimes, after very bad news,
it doesn't matter what you eat as long as you eat it with someone".

Moved by compassion for the people, Jesus enters the crowds,
walking among them and touching and healing those who were sick.
The sick were transformed bodily, while those who witnessed the healings
were transformed spiritually.

In that way and perhaps for that reason, the shoreline by the lake
became such holy ground that no one got up to leave,
and so it must have been in the late afternoon,
just hours before twilight and then sunset,
that the disciples came to Jesus and told him to send the crowds away.

Tell the people to go into the nearby town
and buy food at the local market, they said.
They could come back later if they wished,
and then come back later but for now, “send them away”.
In other words, let them fend for themselves.

“Make it go away” is sometimes our first reaction, too,
when we are confronted by a challenge we would rather not have to face,
especially one that seems to have God’s thumbprint on it.

Life poses enough challenges without God piling on another one,
especially, as in this case, a major and daunting challenge--
such as feeding several thousand hungry people.

Over the last five months, I have tried to stay in contact
with my guide from my January trip to Ethiopia.
Kassahun is the primary wage earner for his family—
including his elderly parents and his two siblings.

But because of the coronavirus, there are no tourists allowed--
and without tourists, there are no tourism jobs--
like working in hotels or guest houses, restaurants,
selling items of jewelry or other keepsakes,
or, in Kassahun’s case, there is no need for guides.

And, to make matters worse, because of the recent political strife
taking place in Ethiopia over the last month and a bit,
internet access has been shut down across the whole country
(except for banks. . .no surprise there, I guess)--
leaving me struggling to find a way to contact him
and help him and his family financially via Western Union--
something I was able to do regularly since the lockdown until about five weeks ago.

His last email to me in response to what I managed to send him
was to express his thanks and to tell me of his prayers
for God's protection over me and mine. . .
and to let me know that, for people in Ethiopia,
the choice they face is to risk dying from the virus
or dying from hunger having no money with which to buy food. . .

and that they are prevented from going to the weekly outdoor markets
because "social distancing" is impossible to practice for the thousands of people
trying to sell their vegetables and fruits as well as goats and donkeys
or exchange their goods with others since no one has any money.

And as I . . . as we . . . look what is happening all over Africa at this moment
with thousands, no, tens of thousands living on the edge of starvation,
doesn't it seem reasonable to want to cry out,
"For goodness' sake, God, enough already, eh?
How about you doing something about this?"

How about you helping these people instead of expecting us to do so--
expecting us. . . me. . . to step in and take responsibility
for caring for so many who are in hungry and in need?
How about you get to work 'fixing' their problems?
After all, I've got. . . we've got. . . more than enough troubles
of our own without you adding to the burden."

But in response to our pleas, we, too, need to hear and be challenged
by the hard words Jesus' spoke to his disciples:
"They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Barbara Brown Taylor interprets that to mean that God is saying to us:
"Not me, but you; not my bread, but yours;
not sometime or somewhere else, but right here and now.
Stop waiting for food to fall from the sky and share what you have.
Stop waiting for a miracle and participate in one instead."

To put it plainly: It seems that what Jesus is saying to us here is
"Remember that there is no such thing as "your" bread
or "my" bread but only "our" bread,
as in "give us this day **our** daily bread".

I mean, feeding the hungry is at the very core of the Christian gospel.
Indeed, as someone much cleverer than I am phrased it:
"Jesus has already told us in Matthew 25 that the question,
'What did you do to feed the hungry?' will be on the final exam."

So, this story, then, reminds us yet again that God always prefers
to work with and through people--people like us—
to deal with the pressing issues of the day.

And pushing this idea a little further, Barbara Brown Taylor says
that where the disciples saw scarcity and are convinced
that there is not enough to go around,
Jesus operates under a totally different set of assumptions—
assuming a sense of abundance and plenty.
As she so neatly words it:
“Jesus knew. . . ‘that wherever there was plenty of God,
there would be plenty of everything else’.”

Nevertheless, the disciples seem surprised by Jesus’ response to them:
“You give them something to eat.”
And when they reply that they have nothing
but five loaves and two fish, Jesus says “Bring them to me”.

He then takes that meagre offering and transforms it
into a feast of such abundance that there are twelve baskets of leftovers.
And those who ate not only had their bodies satisfied
but their spirits and souls were also transformed
by the presence and power of God
working among them and through them—
which is what always happens when we encounter God
in our needs and our hungers and our yearnings.

You see, each time we meet God—whether in the sacraments or in worship
or in relationships or in nature or in solitude--we are changed—
changed for the better. . . or at least changed for the “good-er”:
for the good of others and for the good of the world.

And, in my experience and the experience of others,
one of the results of our being changed. . . transformed. . .
is that we can never go back to the way we were before
and, indeed, would never want to go to the way we were before.

We, you and I, all of us, are different today than we were yesterday
and the day before that and the days before those. . .
because we carry within us and as a part of us this bread of life—
which means that now, with Christ living in us. . .

that is, with his body knitting together with ours
and his lifeblood flowing through our veins—
that we are now his body in this world. . .
his body—in and as our bodies--given to and for the world.

And that brings us to last thing about this story
that practically leaps off the page and hits us between the eyes:
The similarity between this miraculous feeding
on a Galilean hillside and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In his story, Matthew tells us that Jesus took the bread and blessed it,
and broke it, and gave it to the people, who ate and were satisfied.

Now, I'm sure that when the early Christians heard this story,
they would immediately think of the story of Moses and the people of Israel
wandering in the desert and being fed by manna from heaven.

In the same way, then, recalling that story of manna—
which means “bread from heaven”—and remembering how Jesus
applies that description to himself and calls himself the “Bread of Heaven”—
it is with those connections in mind that just minutes from now,
we will do as Jesus did: take, bless, break and share bread. . .
and all will be invited to eat.

And there will be enough for all, and all will be satisfied.
And, even more, as with the crowds back then,
we will not only be satisfied, but transformed and transfigured--
changed into the eyes and ears and hands and feet
of the body of Christ--the one who is the bread of life,
the bread from heaven, bread for the world, bread for the hungry.

After all, it isn't just on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee
or at this table in this place or at tables all over the place
where Jesus uses what is available to feed the hungry.

The same thing also happens to and with us every Sunday
at the end of the liturgy when he “takes” us, “blesses” us,
“breaks” us apart from one another, and “gives”/distributes/sends us
out into the world to be the bread of life for the world
and to share the bread of life with the world.

And by, and because of, this sharing in here and out there,
we never are and never will be the same again.

*Let me close with a story told by John H. Boyle,
the former Associate Priest of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago*

I saw him out of the corner of my eye, walking toward me
on that cold day in April, 1945 as I stood before the box-cars
piled high with the corpses of the inmates of the infamous
Nazi concentration camp in Dachau, Germany, shortly after we had liberated it.

They had been machine-gunned to death in a last-gasp frenzy on the part of the guards when they heard that American forces were coming.

I stared in horror and disbelief at the carloads of carnage, the inhumaneness of it all, confirming beyond the shadow of a doubt the rumors we had heard about such death camps.

As someone approached me from the side, I instinctively reached for the .45 caliber pistol on my hip. Then I noticed his tear-stained face as in a combination of German and broken English he began to speak. “Danke, danke,” he said. “Thank you, thank you.”

He was trying in the only way he could to express his joy and gratitude for what he thought would never happen to him—to be freed, to be spared, to be saved.

Then this Lithuanian Jew, who had been a prisoner at Dachau for over three years, reached into the pocket of his threadbare shirt. Out of his pocket he slowly brought forth a dirty looking crust of bread and held it out to me.

I took it and he told me that the day before, his friend gave it to him as his friend was being led off to be executed.

The man about to die had realized that he would no longer need it, and since bread was a coveted item among the prisoners, he wanted the man in front of me to have it.

And now this man was giving me what had been given him, to show his gratitude. I thanked him and put the crust of bread in the pocket of my field jacket, where it stayed for several weeks. From time to time I would finger it, as though it were a talisman of some sort. It soon was reduced to crumbs.

Then one day, as I sat on a bench before the cathedral in Salzburg, Austria, the site of our divisional headquarters after the war had ended, I emptied the crumbs into my hand, stared at them for a minute, and then fed them to the pigeons gathered round my feet.

Over the course of nearly sixty years in ministry I have officiated at and participated in and partaken of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper more times than I can remember.

But what I do remember is that whenever I have done so, I remember that survivor of the Holocaust, that Lithuanian Jewish man, and a dirty looking crust of bread.

It was not much, but it was all he had to give, and with which to give thanks.

And I have been feeding on the twelve baskets full of the leftovers ever since.

It was enough. It was more than enough. Danke. Danke.

Amen.

SDG

Hymn of the Day #485 "I Am the Bread of Life"

1. "I am the Bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger,
and who believe in me shall not thirst.
No one can come to me unless the Father beckons."

*Refrain: "And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up on the last day."*

2. "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. . .and if you eat. . .
of this bread, you shall live forever. . .you shall live forever." *Refrain.*
3. "Unless. . .you. . .eat of the flesh of the Son of Man. . .and. . .drink of his blood,
and drink. . .of his blood, you shall not have life within you." *Refrain.*
4. "I am the resurrection. . .I. . .am the life. . .If you believe. . .in. . .me,
even. . .though you die,. . .you shall live forever." *Refrain.*
5. Yes, Lord. . .I believe that you. . .are the Christ. . .
the Son. . .of. . . God who. . .has come into. . .the. . .world. *Refrain.*

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God the Creator who was, who is, and who will be forever,
the source of all that is; who loves the world and says it is good.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ - the presence of God embodied and among us.
Jesus walks with the lonely; eats with sinners; feeds the hungry;
forgives the unforgivable; and continues to show us the way.
He calls us to a life that death cannot end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, who has spoken through the prophets and continues
to urge us and lead us to live fully and honestly - seeking justice, loving kindness,
and walking humbly, as a forgiven and a forgiving people whose joy gives life to others.**

**We believe in God's salvation now and in the world to come;
which is freely given to all and not a result of works.**

**We believe in the church as community. Though flawed and imperfect,
the church offers a place for everyone.**

**We believe that Christ is among us and leads us to give ourselves away in love.
We believe we are called to choose hope, to resist evil,
to advocate for the oppressed, and to rejoice in the gift of life. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

You take resources that appear to be meager, bless them, and there is enough. May your church trust that what you bless and ask us to share with the world is abundantly sufficient. Generous One, **hear our prayer.**

Your bountiful creation offers sustenance and life for all creatures. Protect this abundance for the well-being of all. Reverse the damage we have caused your creation, whether in local or provincial forests, rivers, or mineral-rich land. Replenish ground water supplies, provide needed rains in places of drought, and protect forests from wildfires. Life-giving One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer yourself to all the nations and peoples of the earth, inviting everyone to abundant life. Bring the long-awaited prophetic vision to fullness, that all nations will run to you and that nations who do not know you will find their joy in you. Fulfilling One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Hear the anguish of tender hearts who cry to you all over the world in suffering or fear or danger and satisfy their deepest needs. Bring wholeness and healing to those who are wounded or broken in body, heart, soul, and mind (*especially those we name before you now in silence or aloud. . .*) Tender One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer freely the fullness of salvation. Give our congregation and those in our community such welcoming hearts, that our words and actions may extend your free and abundant hospitality to all whom we as your follows may encounter. Open-hearted One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You gather your saints into one, united in the body of Jesus. Bring us with all your beloved and precious children to the heavenly banquet. We remember with love and thanksgiving the saints we have known (*especially Elizabeth, Rick, Dave, and those we remember now in our hearts and minds*). Ever-Living One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, our Bread, our Food, our Hope and our Life. **Amen.**

Sharing of the Peace

May the peace of Christ be with us all here, now, everywhere and always.

All are invited to share by the peace by bowing to others as a sign of respect and affection or, if at home with family or close friends, to share a more intimate expression of peace through a hug or kiss

MEAL

All may take part in the Thanksgiving and the Meal at home by following the printed order below or by participating in the livestreaming as the Presider leads the Thanksgiving. The bread and wine may be raised when they are blessed as a reminder of Christ's being "lifted up" on the cross as the offering of himself for us.

Offering Prayer

God of abundance, in this holy house and in holy houses across this community, this country and around the world, we who worship and thank you set before you the precious fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives.

Teach us patience and hope as we do what we can to care for all those in need until the coming of your Son, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving over the gifts of bread and wine

God is with us. Therefore, let us celebrate and rejoice at the gifts of Christ's presence, love, strength and peace given to us in this foretaste of the feast to come.

Holy God, our Bread from Heaven, our Table, and our Food,
you created a world in which all might be satisfied by your abundance.

You dined with Abraham and Sarah, promising them life,
and fed your people Israel with manna from heaven.

You sent your Son to eat with sinners
and to become food for the world.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; (+)
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, (+) and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his life given for us and his rising from the grave,
we await his coming again to share with us the everlasting feast.

By your Spirit nurture and sustain us with this meal:
strengthen us to serve all in hunger and want,
and by this bread and cup make of us the body of your Son.

Through him all glory and honour is yours, gracious and steadfast One,
with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and forever. **Amen**

Let us pray together with all who have gathered in space and in time to say:

**Our Father/Mother in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

Fraction (*Breaking of the Bread*) and Invitation to the Table

The gifts of God for the beloved children of God. **Thanks be to God.**

In this blessed “one-ness” (or “com-union”) with Christ and with all others everywhere in the world who are also one in Christ, our Saviour grants grace, forgiveness, new life and wholeness. So, come now, and taste the goodness and kindness of God.

Hymn before or during the sharing of the Meal #481 “Come to the Table”
The verse may be repeated as often as it takes for all to commune

Come to the table of mercy, prepared with the wine and the bread.
All who are hungry and thirsty, come, and your souls will be fed.
Come at the Lord’s invitation; receive from his nail-scarred hand.
Eat of the bread of salvation; drink of the blood of the Lamb.

Sharing of the Meal

Prayer after communing

O God, our life, our strength, our food, we give you thanks for sustaining us with the living presence of your Son. By your Holy Spirit, enliven us to be and to share his body in the world, so that more and more we will give you praise and serve your earth and its many peoples, through Jesus Christ, our Rescuer, Healer and Friend. **Amen.**

Blessing/Benediction

May the Eternal One bless us and keep us.
May the face of the Ancient of Days shine on us with grace and mercy.
May our Rock and our Fortress look upon us with favour and ✠ give us peace. Amen.

Sending Song #538 “The Lord Now Sends Us Forth”

Chorus: The Lord now send us forth with hands to serve and give,
to make of all the earth, a better place to live. (*Repeat*)

The angels are not sent into our world of pain,
to do what we were meant to do in Jesus name;
that falls to you and me and all who are made free.
Help us, O Lord, we pray to do your will today. (*Repeat verse and chorus*)

Dismissal

Let us go in peace and gladly share
what has been gladly given and gladly received.
May we do so now and always.

Postlude