

# Season after PENTECOST

## Prayer

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, the words of our Saviour are spirit and life. Give us grace to cling to them always, but especially when we find them hard to listen to, that we may discover with Peter and the other apostles that Christ alone has the words of eternal life. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious Lord, look in mercy on all the baptized, pour out Your Spirit on them and fill them with the light of Your Word, so that Your people may live as children of the light, taking no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Wisdom from on high, You set a banquet before us in Word and Supper and summon us to leave our simple ways and live, walking in the way of insight. Remember our Synod President \_\_\_\_\_; our Regional Pastor \_\_\_\_\_; and all the pastors of our Synod and those who serve in Your Church. Grant that they may always increase in learning and find knowing You to be the path of insight. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Raise up, we beg You, Lord, ever new workers for Your harvest fields, determined like Joshua of old to serve You alone. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Ruler of all, look in compassion on our nation's prime minister; on all who serve in the parliament and in the provincial government; on all judges and those who serve in our armed forces. Uphold them in honour and integrity, and make them a blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful Father, Your Son is the healer of the sick, the resurrection of the dead and our bread of life. Hear our prayers today for those who suffer, those taking treatments or facing surgery, the sick and those who are dying. [We especially commend to Your loving hands \_\_\_\_\_.] Comfort them and sustain them with Your powerful Word, granting whatever healing You will. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Bountiful Giver, Your Son assures us that His flesh is true food and His blood true drink, and that those who feed on Him will live forever because of Him. By Your Spirit, prepare our hearts to welcome Him as He comes to us in the blessed Sacrament that we may rejoice in His promises and depart in His peace. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Source of all life, on the great day of the resurrection Your Son will call all who fell asleep in Him to arise from the dead and shine in His light. Receive our thanks for the faithful who departed this life trusting in His promises. Bring us with them into the light of that day that has no evening. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow His steps in the way that leads to life eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

Psalms 34:12-22  
(antiphon v. 11)  
Proverbs 9:1-10  
or Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18  
Ephesians 5:6-21  
John 6:51-69

## Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 696 or 526  
Other Hymns – 523 (OT1), 862  
(OT2), 411 (E), 697 (E), 811 (E), 625  
(G), 689 (G)

# *Season after* **PENTECOST SERMON**

## **TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Proper 15)** **August 15, 2021**

**Sermon Text: John 6:51-69**

*'How Can This Be?'*

“How can this be?” That’s essentially the question that the crowds who have been listening to Jesus in the Gospel Readings the last three weeks finally end up asking in our reading today. “How can this be?” they say. “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

In one sense it is a good question . . . a really good question. What Jesus has been saying to us in here in the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel defies any logic, any rationality, any human understanding. If you and I had been there among that crowd and had stood there listening to Jesus talk extensively about how He is the Bread of Life that came down from heaven . . . and if we had heard Him say that everyone who eats the bread that He gives will live forever . . . and then, finally, if we heard Him conclude the point that He has been making for some thirty verses now by saying that the bread that He gives for the life of the world is His flesh – we would probably be asking the same thing. We would be asking, “How can this be?” “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” In that sense “How can this be?” is a good question. At the same time, however, as Jesus answers this question (or, more accurately, as Jesus doesn’t answer this question), He shows us that it is entirely the wrong question to be asking.

The crowds asked “How?” but Jesus answers with “Why?” So He says, “Truly, Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you.” Jesus does not explain how this can be or how He intends to give His flesh to these people for them to eat. He does not answer the “How?” question. He answers the “Why?” question. Why does this man give us His flesh to eat? The reason, Jesus says, is simple. Why does He give us His flesh to eat? Because without it, without His flesh and blood to eat and drink, we have no life in us. And with it, with His flesh and blood, we have

eternal life and He will raise us up on the last day. That's the "Why?", that's what matters.

The "How?" question that the crowds asked when they heard Jesus talk about His flesh being the bread that He gives for the life of the world betrays what they think about who He is. "How can this MAN give us his flesh to eat?" they wonder. For them Jesus is just a man. They made that clear earlier in the conversation too when (as we heard last week) they grumbled about Jesus because He said that He came down from heaven. They knew (or thought they knew) His mother and father and were certain He had not come from heaven. "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph?" they said.

For them Jesus was not the Son of God in human flesh, to them He was just another man. For them the words that they heard Jesus speaking were not the Words of the Son of God, to them they were just the words of another teacher. As such, they did not believe He had come down from heaven, they did not believe that He could give His flesh as the bread of life, and they walked away from Him leaving the promises that He was offering to them sitting on the table.

You and I know, however, that Jesus is God's Son. We know that His Words are true. We know that, because of our fallen sinful condition, there is not life in us. And we know, even though we may not understand how, that our Lord Jesus does give His flesh and blood as true food and true drink to give life to the world. We know and believe these things. At the same time, however, the temptation always remains to doubt. Our minds, seeking to be wise by worldly standards, begin to question if the words we read in Scripture could really be God's Word. Ideas from out there in the world creep into our minds suggesting that perhaps these are just the words of men – the disciples of Jesus for example, who did their best to get everything down right, but made some mistakes along the way; or that the words of the Bible were true for people in one time, but might mean something different for us today; or that some parts of the Bible (the New Testament for example) are true, but other parts (like the Old Testament) are just made up stories. The source of these ideas and this kind of thinking is none other than Satan himself. He always wants us to be wondering as we read and hear God's Word, "Did God really say that?"

Under the guise of wisdom and understanding, Satan tempts us to believe that we somehow know better than God, that we understand this world, our lives,

and everything about them better than He does. This is, of course, is a lie and the opposite of wisdom. In fact, it is foolishness.

Wisdom, however, real wisdom . . . godly wisdom, begins with fearing God. Proverbs chapter 9 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” Wisdom begins with fearing God, respecting Him as the source of everything that exists . . . the giver of all that is good . . . the just law maker . . . the forgiver of sins. Wisdom begins with understanding and accepting that God’s ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. It begins with accepting God’s Word as God’s Word and believing it because it is God’s Word. From there wisdom flows. When we come to His Word, His banquet table, as simple, unlearned people lacking in sense, He fills us with His Wisdom to know the depth of His love for us that would send a Saviour to us to give His flesh for us on the cross and rise from the dead that we, who have no life in us, might live in Him.

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood,” Jesus says, “has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

In these words it is as if Jesus – the real Wisdom of God – is setting a table before you and inviting you to come, sit, and eat. He offers to fill you with His goodness, His love, His forgiveness. He offers you His life. He offers to you freely everything that He has won for you by His death on the cross and His rising from the dead.

After Jesus said these things, when His discussion with the crowds who had followed Him from the other side of the lake and who had been feed by His hand miraculously with five loaves and two fish had finally come to an end, John says that many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. Why? Because they could not see how this could possibly be. In their own so called “wisdom” they walk away from the source of true Wisdom, God Himself in human flesh. And as they walk away look what they left on the table – eternal life, resurrection on the last day, abiding in Christ, having Christ abide in them, living because of Him, living forever, forgiveness of sins, peace, joy, and, yes, even wisdom. Wisdom – human worldly wisdom – cast these things aside

for the sake of understanding. But faith, rejoicing in God's Word and promises, clings to these things as our sure and only hope.

When those who were offended by Jesus' words and refused to believe His teaching had left Him; He then turned to the twelve . . . the faithful (or not so faithful) twelve disciples who just the night before had been terrified when they saw Him walking on the water . . . and said, "Do you want to go away as well?" As he often did, Simon Peter spoke up on behalf of the rest and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?"

To be sure, Peter and the others did not understand how Jesus could give His flesh for people to eat any more than the others in the crowd that day did. Throughout their time with Jesus, they struggled day by day, moment by moment, to believe and trust His Words. More often than not, their faith failed . . . just as it had in the boat. But in this moment, by God's grace, they trusted in His Words. They confessed the truth – the words of Jesus are the words of eternal life. They didn't understand how Jesus' words could be true, and they certainly did not know how it all worked or have it all figured out; but they knew that no one had ever spoken like this before. And, as a result, they had concluded that these words, even if they were "hard" and difficult to understand, were worth believing.

So it is with us. We often don't understand . . . we struggle . . . we doubt . . . we question. But it always comes back to this – whose Word is it? Are these words, the words we read in Scripture, just the words of some man or are they the words of the Son of God? If these are the Words of the Son of God are they not worth believing even if we don't understand them? And these are the words of eternal life! Thanks be to God that we, by His grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, have believed and come to know that He, our Lord Jesus, is the Holy One of God who gives His flesh as our bread of life. There is no life in us apart from Him, but with Him and in Him we have life – life that lasts forever. In Jesus name. Amen.