

Introduction

Jesus says that the bread he gives for the life of the world is his flesh, and whoever eats this bread has eternal life now and will be raised on the last day. In Ephesians Paul tells us what this life Jesus gives us looks like, this life we live as those marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit in baptism. We live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. The whole purpose of life is giving yourself for the other.

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread that gives life to the world. Give us this bread always, that he may live in us and we in him, and that, strengthened by this food, we may live as his body in the world, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

This reading describes some of the troubles in King David's family. His son Absalom has amassed an army and seized David's throne. Those loyal to David fight Absalom's forces and defeat them. David himself is chiefly concerned about the well-being of his son, even though that son has betrayed him.

⁵[King David] ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

⁶So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. ⁸The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

⁹Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

¹⁵And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

³¹Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the LORD has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you." ³²The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man."

³³The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Psalm 130

¹Out | of the depths

I cry to | you, O LORD;

²O LORD, | hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my | supplication.

³If you were to keep watch | over sins,

O LORD, | who could stand?

⁴Yet with you | is forgiveness,

in order that you | may be feared.

⁵I wait for you, O LORD; | my soul waits;

in your word | is my hope.

**⁶My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning,
more than those who keep watch | for the morning.**

⁷O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is | steadfast love;

with the LORD there is plen- | teous redemption.

⁸For the LORD shall | redeem Israel

from | all their sins.

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:25--5:2

Christians are called to be imitators of God. This does not mean Christians are perfect. Rather, the Spirit is at work in our lives so that our actions and attitudes genuinely reflect the love and forgiveness we have received through Christ and his death.

²⁵So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. ^{5:1}Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Gospel Reading: John 6:35, 41-51

After feeding more than five thousand people in the wilderness, Jesus teaches them regarding the true significance of this remarkable sign.

³⁵Jesus said to [the crowd,] “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I 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.”

Prayers of Intercession

Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation, saying “God in your mercy,” and responding, “hear our prayer.”

A brief silence.

For the church of Christ in all its diverse forms. For mission developers, new mission starts, and all communities of faith exploring new models of ministry for the sake of the gospel. For congregations facing difficult decisions about their future. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For the health and well-being of creation. For shade trees that provide refuge from the hot summer sun. For lakes, rivers, and oceans contaminated by pollution and all who lack clean water. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those called to positions of authority in our legal system, we pray. For judges, lawyers, law clerks, and court employees who ensure the fair administration of justice. For corrections officers and prison chaplains, that they would deal mercifully with those who are incarcerated. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who cry out to you in their affliction. For exiles, refugees, and others who face long and difficult journeys, uncertain about the future. For all who mourn the death of a loved one. For all who are sick (*especially those who we name now, either silently on our hearts, or aloud...* [pause]). God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For this assembly gathered around your table, we pray. For those among us who bake bread and prepare the vessels for our communion celebration. For those who bring the food from this table to those who are homebound or hospitalized. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who have been raised to eternal life, we give thanks. With (*Dominic, name/s, and*) all the saints we praise you for the bread of life that keeps us in your love forever. 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.

A reflection for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost...

The Greatest Bread

Jesus uses the image of bread to demonstrate that, even compared to all the great things God has done before, God's greatest miracle is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus, the bread of life, is a greater miracle than the manna God sent in the desert (Exod. 16:14), greater than the bread the angel brought to restore Elijah (1 Kings 19:4-8), greater even than the loaves Jesus had just multiplied to feed a crowd of more than five thousand people (John 6:1-14)! In Jesus, God gives bread for the journey—not only for this life, but also into eternal life.

We're so familiar with this image that it loses some of its original power. But the claim Jesus is making here is a radical one—and a dangerous one. To Jesus' original audience, his claim to be the bread from heaven, the Son of God, must have sounded like outrageous blasphemy. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" they say. "How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (John 6:42). Who does this guy think he is?

Jesus' message is both outrageous and outrageously comforting: anyone who eats this bread will live forever. The Son of God meets us in this life and gives us real and certain hope for eternal life. Normal bread is amazing in its own right; manna is miraculous. But Jesus Christ is the true bread and the greatest miracle of all. "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8).

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