



THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 22, 2021

BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

In today's gospel many people take offense at Jesus' invitation to eat His flesh and drink His blood; even many of Jesus' disciples peel off. This is the backdrop in John's gospel for Peter's confession of faith. "To whom can we go?" asks Peter, in words we sometimes sing just before the gospel is read. "You have the words of eternal life." In order to take such a stand, as

Peter and Joshua did, Paul tells us to arm ourselves with the word of God. We pray in the Spirit that we might be bold ambassadors of the gospel.

✝ GATHERING ✝

OPENING HYMN *You Are the Way* #464 (grn)

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS on screen

GREETING on screen

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P. Holy God, Your word feeds Your people with life that is eternal. Direct our choices and preserve us in Your truth, that, renouncing what is false and evil, we may live in You, through Your Son, Jesus Christ Lord.

C. Amen.

✝ WORD ✝

FIRST READING: Joshua 24:1–2a, 14–18

In the Near East covenant means "agreement" or "alliance." It describes relationships and is the primary word used to characterize the relationship between God and Israel. By delivering Israel, God has already begun the relationship. Joshua calls upon the people to respond.

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ¹⁴Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the LORD our God Who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and Who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”

L. The Word of the Lord. C. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 34:15–22

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous.

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous,
and His ears are open to their cry.

¹⁶**The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.**

¹⁷The righteous cry, and the LORD hears them
and delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁸**The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.**

¹⁹Many are the troubles of the righteous,
but the LORD will deliver him out of them all.

²⁰**He will keep safe all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.**

²¹Evil shall slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.

²²**The LORD ransoms the life of His servants,
and none will be punished who trust in Him.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 6:10–20

The military language in this passage calls to mind the power of the Roman Empire in the first century. In order to remain strong in the face of cosmic evil forces followers of Christ are to put on the armor of God which includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the gift of salvation, and the word of God' inspired by the Spirit.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able

to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

L. The Word of the Lord. C. **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Lord, to whom...

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HOLY GOSPEL: St. John 6:56-69

The “hard saying” that offends Jesus’ disciples is his claim that his followers must eat his flesh and drink his blood. The followers who return to their old lives know something about how odd this sounds. Simon Peter, on the other hand, knows something about the scarcity of living, gracious words. He asks the most important question: “To whom shall we go?”

C. **Glory to You, O Lord.**

[Jesus said,] ⁵⁶“Those 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.” ⁵⁹He said these things while He was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of His disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that His disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶Because of this many of His disciples turned back and no longer went about with Him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.”

P. The Gospel of the Lord.

C. **Praise to You, O Christ.**

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY	<i>O Jesus I Have Promised</i>	#503 (grn)
THE APOSTLES' CREED		page 85
PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH		
P. ... Lord, in Your mercy,		
C. hear our prayer.		
SHARING THE PEACE OF THE LORD		
ANNOUNCEMENTS		
OFFERING /OFFERTORY	<i>Let the vineyards...</i>	page 86
OFFERTORY PRAYER		page 87
+ MEAL +		
THE GREAT THANKSGIVING		page 88
EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER		
P. You are indeed holy ... accomplished our salvation.		
C. Amen.		
P. In the night in ... the Lord's death until He comes.		
C. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.		
P. Lord God, send now Your Holy Spirit ... both now and forever.		
C. Amen.		
THE LORD'S PRAYER		page 91
DISTRIBUTION		
POST-COMMUNION BLESSING		page 92
POST-COMMUNION SONG	<i>Thank the Lord</i>	page 92
POST COMMUNION PRAYER		
P. Jesus Christ, You have given . . . Lord forevermore.		
C. Amen.		
+ SENDING +		
BENEDICTION		
P. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in His love.		
Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.		
C. Amen		

DISMISSAL

P. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

C. Thanks be to God.

THOSE WHO SERVE:

Ministers: All the People of God

Presider: Pastor Ellen Munter

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Reader: Tracy Wentz

Camera: Josh Sumption

Projection: James Kamrath/Kendon Knutson
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Shirlee Gabbert, Bill and Karen Pohlen
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An opportunity to Lend a Hand

The Board of Education is looking for a volunteer to join with them as Rachel Wollum has moved to Watertown for her education and will not be able to actively participate. If you have an interest in being involved in the educational programs of the youth of Bethel, please let Paula Syltie or Pastor Ellen know. Our kids are the future of Bethel.

To Whom Can We Go?

The disciples following Jesus knew that He often had some rather unusual things to say about himself and about God, but in today's gospel, they feel that their teacher has gone too far: "Those who eat My flesh and drink My blood abide in Me and I in them," Jesus proclaims (John 6:56). For Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, for whom consuming blood of any type was forbidden and who killed animals according to strict religious regulations, this statement was nothing short of sacrilegious. For everyone else, it was just ridiculous. "Whoever eats Me will live because of Me" (John 6:57). Say what? The scandal caused large numbers of Jesus' disciples to leave; after all, what sort of person would say such a thing?

Like the early disciples, we can find following Jesus baffling and difficult. Love our neighbors when they are so unlovable? Take sabbath rest when there's work to be done? Trust that this Jesus fellow really is God-become-human and was crucified, died, and *raised back to life*? When the culture tells us to speak our own truth, eat fewer carbs, build up our bank accounts, exercise more, buy a better day planner or a new car or more expensive laundry detergent, and lean into our own potential to optimize our lives, it can be tempting to take hold of the latest self-help gospel. It's so concrete. Trusting God instead of ourselves? How scandalous, how ridiculous. "I've got this," we prefer to say.

But hear Jesus' words in this week's gospel: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless" (John 6:63). This is not a condemnation; it is a promise that the One Who meets us at the table in bread, wine, flesh, and blood also sends His Spirit to give you life. May you hear that promise today and let the Holy Spirit draw from your lips the same confession as Peter: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Upcoming Commemorations

Bartholomew, Apostle Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Mentioned as one of Jesus' disciples in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Bartholomew's name is replaced in John's gospel by Nathanael, leading many to believe that the two are different names for the same person. Little is known about his work, though some traditions place him later in India or Armenia.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, died 430 Saturday, August 28, 2021

Augustine was one of the greatest theologians of the Western church. A native of North Africa, he recovered from a debauched young adulthood through the influence of his mother, Monica, and Bishop Ambrose of Milan. Besides writing influential theological books, he served as bishop of Hippo, in present-day Algeria.

Moses the Black, monk, martyr, died around 400 Saturday, August 28, 2021

Converted from life as a thief and a robber to Christianity, Moses was an Ethiopian who became a desert monk at Skete. The change in his heart and life had a profound impact on his native country. He was murdered when Berber bandits attacked his monastery.