



Introduction

Wisdom prepares a feast, sets her table, and invites all to come and eat her bread and drink her wine. Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), today invites us to eat his flesh and drink his blood. John's gospel includes no account of the institution of the Lord's supper, but here we can't help hearing Jesus' words as an invitation to the meal of bread and wine we share.

Confession and Forgiveness

In the name of the Father, and of the ✙ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone.

Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and one another.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,

so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

In the name of ✙ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen**

Opening Hymn ELW # 519

Open Your Ears, O Faithful People

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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.**

First Reading: Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom is portrayed as a woman who invites people to partake of her banquet. Just as ordinary food is necessary for physical life, Wisdom's food—insight and understanding—is necessary for fullness of life with God. Partaking of Wisdom's banquet is the way to life.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Psalm 34:9-14

⁹Fear the LORD, you saints of the LORD, for those who fear the LORD lack nothing.

¹⁰**The lions are in want and suffer hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack nothing that is good.**

¹¹Come, children, and listen to me; I will teach you reverence for the LORD.

¹²**Who among you takes pleasure in life and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?**

¹³Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from lying words.

¹⁴**Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.**

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

True wisdom integrates our new reality in Christ with our Christian fellowship and daily conduct. Because we are filled with the Spirit, Christians regularly rejoice together, give thanks to God for one another, and care for one another. In this way we revere our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: John 6:51-58

In John's gospel, the feeding of the five thousand leads to extended teaching in which Jesus identifies himself as the true "bread of life." Finally, in these verses, he makes a connection that would not be understood until after his death, in light of the church's celebration of holy communion.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Several years ago, on Christmas Eve, my husband Ray and I were on break between semesters in seminary, away from home, and visiting another Lutheran congregation. During the offertory, a young woman dressed in the light blue we often use as a costume for the Virgin Mary came down the aisle from the back of the church to the altar cradling what appeared to be an infant wrapped in white, and gave it to the pastor, who placed it carefully on the altar.

A few moments later, during the communion prayers, the pastor unwrapped the white covering to reveal a large loaf of bread, which he lifted and at the appropriate moment, broke in two, so that we could receive communion.

It was a startling image. Perhaps a bit too graphic for some, it was a dramatic representation of the truth of Jesus Christ, who arrived as a baby to be given away as bread for the world.

If we are honest, the language of this gospel passage seems a bit too graphic. It might make us a bit squeamish, as it did the Jews listening to Jesus that day. Based on these verses, we could understand why some non-believers even accused early Christians of being cannibals.

The most honest reaction I have ever heard to this passage is “Ew, yuck.” Even when we are talking about beef, pork, and chicken – staples of our modern diet – we are rarely quite so graphic about “eating flesh.” But Jesus was very direct with those who would listen.

Beyond claiming to be the Bread of Life, Jesus went on to say that if we do not each of this flesh and drink this blood, we have no life in us. We will have no claim to eternal life.

The truth is, we are not simply invited to share this meal at the Lord’s Table. We are essentially commanded to partake, in order to receive true life, so that we will abide in Jesus and he in us.

I have often heard – and repeated to you – that as we receive Holy Communion, we become what we receive: through receiving the Body of Christ we become the Body of Christ in the world.

I heard another quote about this for the first time this week, attributed to Saint Augustine. One that turns this expression around a bit: “Come to the table to receive what you are. Then go into the world to be what you have received.” I’m grateful to the person who pointed this out to me, because it is true. I think Augustine got it right.

We have already been made children of God, formed into the Body of Christ, through our baptisms. At the table, we do receive what we already are. Then we are sent out from this place into the world to be what we receive here at the table.

I find myself wondering what that means for each of us. How we find our lives changed – here and now as well as for eternity, by this nibble of bread and sip of wine. Do we recognize that it is not just an act done in remembrance of Christ? Do we even realize what a profound effect it has on our lives?

When we eat ordinary bread with our usual meals, it fills our bellies and provides sustenance for our earthly life. At least for a short time. But we will hunger again and we will die.

When we eat the living bread, at the Lord’s Table, in the sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus has promised that we will live forever. So we are invited, encouraged, even commanded - to come to the table as often as we can to eat of this Bread of Life.

To receive the Living Bread from heaven. To receive what we already are, so that we can go out into the world and be the Body of Christ for the sake of the world.

As I prepare this service for those who are not able to join us at worship on a regular basis, I am mindful that due to the pandemic, it may have been quite some time since you have received communion. Please know that Pastor Ray and I are both working to make visits and bring communion to you as pandemic restrictions allow.

In the meantime, we can be certain that God extends grace to us in spite of the difficult circumstances we are enduring. I share these words from a colleague, the Rev. Dr. Delmar Chilton, who reassures us of the good news that the presence of God is always with us:

“As we come to the table, we are called to be mindful of Jesus’ presence in our midst. It was a real presence then and it is a real presence now.

The Gospel is that Jesus really, truly came down from heaven to live among us as the fleshly love of God.

The Gospel is that Jesus really, truly died upon the cross, giving up his flesh and spilling his blood, to save us from our sins.

The Gospel is that God almighty really, truly raised him from the dead, brought him out of the grave to a new and eternal life.

The Gospel is that God almighty really, truly has just such a future in store for each and every one of us. Amen and amen.”

Hymn of the Day ELW # 542/LBW # 197

O Living Bread from Heaven

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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, especially those in the path of Tropical Storm Fred. 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 now. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of beauty, inspire artists. 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.**

God of resurrection, bring us to new life. Give us the living bread from heaven through which we abide in your love, and on the last day raise us with all the saints to eternal life. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

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.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 705 /LBW # 415

God of Grace and God of Glory

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.