

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
P.O. Box 222
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
August 2, 2020

Prelude

Call to Worship

Christine Longhurst, *re: Worship*

Come and worship,
everyone on earth,
everywhere the sun shines.
Let's praise God together!

For listening when we call,
answering our prayers,
forgiving our mistakes,
and providing what we need.
Let's praise God together!

Come and worship,
everyone on earth,
everywhere the sun shines and the rain falls.
Let's praise God together!

Hymn One Bread, One Body Text and Music: John B. Foley, SJ, 1978

One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many, throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.

Gentile or Jew, servant or free,
woman or man, no more. Refrain.

Many the gifts, many the works,
one in the Lord of all. Refrain.

Grain for the fields, scattered and grown,
gathered to one, for all. Refrain.

Prayer of Confession

Lord of abundance, compassion, and mercy, when we see the overwhelming needs of your world, our spirits deflate. Sadness, despair, anger, guilt, and fatigue overwhelm us.

We know we are the body of Christ in the world, but, relieving pain and suffering seems impossible.

We confess to turning our heads, we confess to weak resignation, we confess to indifference, oblivious to the ways we may contribute to the sin of injustice, or fail to show up when we are called on to help.

God, save us from ourselves and our rationalizations. Tune our hearts to your control, that we may respond in faith and commitment, working to alleviate circumstances and systems that would do harm to your beloved community.

Forgive us when and where we fail, remove any wicked way in us, and restore us to right relationship with you, made possible through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Response Take, O Take Me as I Am.

Text and Music: John L. Bell, 1995, WCRG, Iona Community

Take, O take me as I am;

summon out what I shall be;

set your seal upon my heart and live in me. Repeat.

Assurance of Pardon

The Lord is just in all ways, and kind in what God does. God is near to all who call upon him, who come in repentance, turning away from sin and turning toward God's grace.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel: in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Be at peace.

Scripture Reading Matthew 14: 13-21

The Morning Message

Here we are on the first Sunday of August. Our usual and customary practice at Kuhn is to celebrate Communion on the first Sunday of the month. Since we can't be together to do that, I wanted to set aside a time to at least think about the role of bread in our lives. Bread commands center stage in the story of our faith, both the Christian faith and the faith of our forebears, the Jews.

I love bread...when I was a kid, driving past Heiner's bakery could send me into ecstasy. My Brownie troop toured the bakery once and I was so disappointed. They gave us all little packaged cupcakes, which most of the girls just raved over. But, I was hoping for that warm, yeasty bread.

Bread. I love it and I struggle with it. There are some diet plans popular today that call for the elimination of bread and all grain products and other starches. I tried that once for several weeks. It did work, but, I was miserable and I made everyone around me share in that misery.

It's still a choice for me. But, my daughter is gluten intolerant. My son-in-law has celiac disease. These are very serious conditions. It can take a long time to diagnose. In the meantime, people with these issues can become extremely sick. Healing comes with the elimination of gluten and all wheat products. It's hard to plan meals around zero wheat products. Do you know how many food items have wheat in them?

My son-in-law had a death in his family last week. I made a shepherd's pie for them. I could make that dish in my sleep. But, when I started gathering the ingredients, I realized I would need to make some substitutions.

Bread was Ed's mother's specialty. She grew up making it daily for her large family. She was one of ten children. When she made bread, she made loaves, rolls, monkey bread, sticky buns, fried apple pies, pepperoni rolls. She would mail those to her kids when they were in school away from home. We haven't had a loaf of that good bread for a few years now and we all miss it and we miss her.

In Bible times, bread was a food that was made daily. Bread made early in the day was much favored over that which was several hours old. You can understand why: no preservatives, no ziplock bags to keep it fresh. No Kroger.

So, today we have this beautiful story of Jesus preaching to a crowd hungry for the good news of the gospel. In time, they grew hungry for dinner, too, but, all the shops were closed. So, gathering up a meager few loaves and fishes, Jesus prays over them, and miraculously, a feast results, baskets and baskets full.

We are wowed by that. But, we might want to look back a few verses to see what was going on with Jesus that day. He had just learned of the hideous death of someone he loved, his cousin, John, the Baptist. In his grief, Jesus withdrew, probably to have some moments to himself to grieve this loss.

But, the crowd followed him. He would not rest yet. No, he would bear witness to their suffering, their pain, their diseases, their needs. And then he gave them bread.

But, he wants them to understand the deeper meaning: he is the bread that can truly satisfy them. In the gospel of John, Jesus actually calls himself "the bread of heaven."

Jesus offers them food. He offers them himself. He offers us himself.

Jesus still reaches out to those who are hungry and offers them a place at the table. We enter into the graciousness of Christ through the act of eating and drinking with our fellow believers. We receive something of the real presence of Christ through the Sacrament of Communion.

You can't get much closer to something than when you eat it. Taste, touch, smell and sight remind us, teach us, who God is, and who God's Son is... the very bread of life.

When we eat and drink, anytime, we should be aware of the providence of a God who started a relationship with human beings in a garden rich with food. We should recall that God called his people to follow him to a land flowing with milk and honey. We should remember the people of faith whose food was scarce and yet, God provided a way through it with a little flour and a little oil, with manna and quail, with fish and bread, and the best wedding wine.

But, when we eat, we take a risk. We have chosen to participate in a kingdom way of life.

We can no longer eat and forget.

We can no longer eat and walk away.

We can no longer eat and go on unchanged.

We can no longer eat and not be concerned about those who can't.

We seem to be smack in the middle of the summer of our discontent. Summer started around the middle of March and who knows when it will end. The human need around us is monumental. There is no Covid crisis in our town that I know of, there are no violent demonstrations in Barboursville, West Virginia, but there is need, fear, grief, illness, family conflict, addiction, hunger...who will fill all the hungry hearts in our community? Who will fill your hungry heart?

It has been said that at the end of World War II, in the refugee camps for orphans and dislocated kids, the children couldn't sleep. Of course, they couldn't sleep. They had been through a real live hell. But, the adults who cared for them found that after they were fed the evening meal, if they would give the children a piece of bread, just to hold, they would drift off. It was their holding bread. There was more to eat if they were hungry. This was bread to hold, to remind them and to connect them to a great truth...that morning will come, there are grown-ups who cared, and were watching over them to keep them safe, and there would be more to eat when they woke up.

Ghandi said there is so much hunger in the world that God comes to earth as bread.

Oh, my friends, we need that bread, don't we?

One of my cousins is a nurse who works with newborns who enter this life very sick due to their mothers' drug use during pregnancy. She is their holding bread.

A colleague of mine worked night and day following the harrowing floods a few summers ago in southern West Virginia. He organized relief efforts of all sorts, but, housing was his primary focus. He placed people in homes, hotels, apartments, campers, trailers, and tents. He was their holding bread.

For years, two friends of ours drove to a federal prison early every Sunday morning to meet with prisoners, lead a Bible study, and pray. They became the inmates' holding bread.

This week, our youngest grandson spent some time with us. He stayed overnight. He has been having trouble sleeping, no doubt because his life has been upended since the onset of the pandemic. He has lived in three places and was enrolled in three day care centers in two different cities. No wonder he is having sleep terrors. We were prepared for a long night. We were ready to be his holding bread.

We were surprised and relieved that he slept pretty peacefully. He did wake much earlier than we usually do. So, we tucked him into bed with us and we all caught a few more Zs. We were satisfied with that.

But, the surprise came later in the day when we took him to join his mom and dad and the rest of the family. They had just come from the funeral of a family member, the patriarch in fact. A hard day for anyone.

Mommy, Daddy, and Grand Daddy all came out to meet us. As his father lifted the sleeping two-year-old from the car, we could see the grief and pain of the day melt from all the adults' faces. One little squeeze was all it took.

And a little child became their holding bread.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

As the crowds followed Jesus, eager to be filled with hope, we come to this time of worship, seeking to nourish our souls. We are so burdened by the unstable nature of our lives due to the pandemic. Our hearts are filled with concern for family and friends, for our country and our world. Will we ever be normal again? What does normal even mean today?

Fill us with a word of hope and truth that we might not sink into despair, but, look to you for comfort, strength and peace.

Sit us down, as Jesus seated the multitude. Calm us down, as Jesus reassured the disciples. Lift us up, as Jesus encouraged others to reach out in compassion. Give us hearts of confident faith, dwelling gratefully in your presence. Place your healing hands on the places, people, and circumstances we name now in our hearts...praying as Jesus taught us saying, Our Father...Amen.

Blessing 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Go out into the world in peace. Have courage, hold fast to what is good.

Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak and help the suffering.

Honor all people.

Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Postlude