

8-15-2021 12th Sunday after Pentecost.

Welcome, friends. Good to have returned from Montana--with family and grandkids and some downtime--rejoining you by video today. On August 22nd, we are returning to worship together. Gary and I are deciding how best to continue with the video work. More clarity about that will come in the near future.

Let us begin in the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God, tend to us this day with your spirit of infinite compassion. Move within the depths and the crevices of our lives where we long for you. Fill us with that wisdom, which the world cannot give. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The first lesson for today is from **Proverbs**. This is absolutely one of my favorite passages in the whole of scripture, **Proverbs, chapter 9**.

Wisdom has built herself a house, she has hewn her seven pillars, slaughtered a beast, drawn her wine, she has laid the table.

Wisdom has dispatched her maidservants to proclaim from the heights above the city, 'Who is simple? Come this way. Who is simple? Come this way.'

To the fool she says, 'Come, eat my bread. Drink the wine which I have drawn!

Leave foolishness behind, and you will live, go forward in the ways of perception.'

From **Ephesians, chapter 5**. [Ep. 5: 15-20]

Friends, be very careful about the sort of lives that you lead. Like intelligent people, live from wisdom. Do not be senseless. Make the best of the present time, for it is a difficult age. This is why you must not be thoughtless, but recognize what is the yearning of God. Do not waste your lives on dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. Sing songs and hymns and inspired songs among yourselves, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts, always and everywhere giving thanks to God, who is our source, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel for today is from **John, 6th chapter**. [John 6: 55-63]

Jesus says, 'My flesh is real food, my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I will live in that person. As the living God has sent me, I draw life from the God who made us all. So whoever eats of me will also draw life from me. I am the bread which has come down from heaven. It is not like the bread which our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'

Some of Jesus' own disciples were disturbed. They said, 'This is intolerable language. How can people accept this?' And Jesus was aware that he was disturbing. He said, 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life.'

The word of God.

Gary Sponholtz plays and sings "Eat This Bread, Drink this Cup".

We begin in the name of God.

The holy mystery: the Incarnation, compassion, and wisdom in the spirit, breathes new life into us all. Poet, Christopher Bobbin, said, "The living are few, and the dead abound in this life--the dead being those who never let go, and who can't walk away from themselves into love or laughter."

'Who is simple? Come this way!'

I have shared with you, previously, that among the Aborigines of Australia they believe we each have three brains, and this brain in our heads is also what they call 'tangled, fish line'. There's also the brain of the heart which is warm with compassion, and the brain of the gut which speaks truth and wisdom to us.

All religions talk about crossing over into simplicity, this great vast simplicity which holds both the contradictions of life and our aspirations. The simplicity of wisdom doesn't explain everything. It doesn't attempt to do that. It tries to reveal deeper truths to us of what we are experiencing in this life.

It's been said there are only two things we actually need to guard against. The first are the distractions of this world, which seduce us and draw us away from wisdom and what really matters. That's what Ephesians is speaking of this morning. *Don't waste your lives. Don't dissipate your resources and gifts on things that don't matter.* The second thing to guard against is our preoccupation with ourselves. I can be another great trap.

'Who is simple? Come this way!'

We usually claim that the ego is the culprit behind all the nastiness that's going on in our lives and among others. But the truth is, our ego has no separate identity. The ego cannot be fixed. It cannot be manipulated, cannot be turned towards what we wanted to face, because the ego is parasite. The ego fuels itself by insisting on being the center of attention, whether that is with the prominence of arrogance, or with an addiction to suffering. The ego loves to suffer: *if you only knew how bad I've got it!*

The second parasitical fuel of the ego is comparing ourselves with others. It just loves to compare. *Now I happen to be extremely good at comparing myself with others. In fact, one of the greatest disappointments of my life is how other people are always failing. Because if I was them, I could be so much better than they are, but they won't listen to me!*

Mystics have taught throughout the ages, 'Do not dare to compare yourself with others, for you have no idea what they are experiencing, and this dead end of comparison quickly can become an addiction.' Comparing leads to envy, jealousy, competition, rivalry, scapegoating, and even violence, whether we destroy another person or destroy a country.

Better, the great ones have taught to remind ourselves of our own faults and weaknesses not to put ourselves down, not to make ourselves unworthy, but because humility is the path that leads to honesty, and kindness, and caring, and grace.

Usually we derive our sense of who we are from what we think other people think of us. Yes, we're trying to second-guess what other people are thinking of us, and that creates the truth of who we are. In the spiritual life, we're invited to create a sense of our self that simply stands on the qualities of who we are, with no need for comparison with others, or opponents, or someone else to be better than.

'Who is simple? Who can welcome the contradictions, the aspirations, the absurdity, the pain, the beauty of it all? Come this way!'

The meal Jesus gives us is the gift of himself, in ordinary bread and wine. He gives us the earth as a home, and gives us the wisdom to celebrate communion with all life in all of its brokenness. This meal sustains no separate me, but it sustains a self-forgetting in the self-giving 'we'.

The rabbi of some generations ago, asked his disciples, 'How can you tell when the dawn has arrived?' One disciple said, 'When you can distinguish a tree from a shrub on the hillside.' Another said, 'No, I think it's when you can distinguish a goat from a sheep at some distance.' And the rabbi said, 'No, no. When the day comes that you can recognize even a stranger as your brother or sister, then the dawn arrives.'

'Who is simple? Come this way!'
Amen.

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Let us pray.

O God, your divine simplicity seems so elegant and so difficult.
We bless you for the Christ in our midst who walks with us this broken path, life,
insisting that the healing of your mercy can bring us to that new creation
for which the earth and we long.

Hold us in these times of absurdity in the resurgence of COVID.
Bless all of the children who have been hospitalized with this vicious pandemic;
have mercy on their parents.

Bring wisdom and sanity to leaders who have yet to accept the monstrosity of this illness.
Help us to be at peace from deep within, with all that is creating commotion in our lives these days.

Let us know your presence.
Give us the grace to discern your wisdom,
and live our days from that peace, which the world cannot give.
We pray in Christ's name.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and give you wisdom.

Gary plays and sings "God Has Chosen Me".