

Devotions for the week of the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 2-6

Monday of Pentecost 10 – Prayer of the Week

Merciful Father, You gave Your son Jesus as the heavenly bread of life. Grant us faith to feast on the Him in Your Word and Sacraments that we may be nourished into life everlasting; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Tuesday of Pentecost 10 – Exodus 16:2-15

² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.

¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

The parochial school I attended at the parish my father served had a hot lunch program. An elderly woman in the congregation, her name was Flora, would come every day and make a hot meal for the scores of children who attended. After elementary school, I attended a Lutheran boarding high school in Missouri. From there college at Concordia, Seward. After college it was straight to St. Louis for the

Seminary. By my estimation I ate Lutheran school cafeteria food for close to 20 consecutive years. I cannot count the number of times I beheld the portion which had been scooped onto my plate, turned to some fellow student, and asked, "What is it?"

In one of the great ironies of language and history, the Hebrew word "manna" means simply "What is it?" I have some empathy for the Israelites in their wandering. I also spent years eating "what is it?" Of course, it was a miracle then. But the same God who rained manna from heaven upon the Israelites of old also fed me through the loving hands of Flora and the other men and women who prepared my meals in those Lutheran schools. I too ate from the same hand of God. Perhaps we would not qualify it as the same sort of miracle, but it was his providential care all the same. I had cultivated my ability to complain about the food I ate in those cafeterias. We rather thought it our right and obligation as students. The Israelites complained too. They woke up to a miracle six days a week and found a reason to grouse about it. Am I really any better?

Wednesday of Pentecost 10 – Psalm 145:10-21

¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!

¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,

¹² to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

[The LORD is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.]

¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶ You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.

²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

Thursday of Pentecost 10 – Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The phone rang one afternoon as I was writing these devotions, about a year ago. It was a member of the congregation, an elderly man. He was in failing health and the pandemic was raging. He hardly ever left his house. We kept in touch via phone. Today he called me. He was frantic. Someone had left a message on his phone telling him that his Social Security number had been compromised and his account was being shut down. There was a number to call so he could set things right. But before he called that number, he called me. I am so glad he trusted me enough to make that call to me first.

Most likely you are aware that this is a scam. Had he called that number he would have been prompted to give them a great deal of personal information, perhaps even access to his bank account. He could have been robbed of what little money he had left. I urged him not to call the number back, to ignore the message that had been left on his phone. Isolation and a gradual diminution of his faculties had left him vulnerable and unsure of himself. The voice sounded so authoritative on the message. He was wavering. So, I had him call another friend, an attorney we both knew, someone he had worked with before, someone he also trusted. Together we talked our friend away from the dangerous edge of being a victim of unscrupulous and cunning people who prey on the elderly.

Paul urges us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. If you examine that walk a little more, you will see that it entails the essential ingredients of living together in the community of the church: honesty, love, patience, gentleness, and service rendered to a common Lord Jesus. Paul goes on to say that such a walk leads to a maturity in which we are no longer tossed about like infants on the waves of human

cunning and craftiness in deceitful schemes. My elderly friend had walked as a Christian for many years. When he was vulnerable, that community came to his rescue, and he was not subject to the cunning and deceit of those who sought him harm. His pastor and a Christian attorney helped him work properly and built him up in love. It is easy to disparage the church. It has so many faults. It is hard to love the church sometimes and we are tempted to go it alone. But in truth, we need each other. Alone we are very vulnerable. Someday I may need that calm voice of someone I have served with and have listened to before to tell me not to do something. Go to church, join a committee, the choir, or another group. Serve side by side with other Christians. Christ is building you up to a maturity which is unassailable by our foe.

Friday of Pentecost 10 – John 6:22-35

²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Have you ever eaten at an Ethiopian restaurant? If not, you should give it a try. Did you know that there are more Lutherans in Ethiopia than in North America? Since the middle of the 20th century there has been explosive growth in the Lutheran movement among the Amharic and Oromo peoples of Ethiopia. Ethiopian food may be more Lutheran than the green Jell-O salad and that tater tot and green bean casserole which shows up at every Lutheran potluck. If you go, however, be ready not to use silverware. Ethiopia is an ancient place, steeped in history. Forks are a relatively recent invention. The first recorded use of a fork was at a meal in 1518 in Vienna. Martin Luther probably never used one. People in Ethiopia tear off a small piece of flat bread and use that to scoop up the vegetable, meat, or other parts of their meal. In truth, most Ethiopian restaurants I have visited have accommodated their American guests and

provide you with fork and spoon, but you will also receive a large piece of spongy, flat bread which is the traditional way to eat Ethiopian food.

This use of bread as a utensil is critical to what Jesus tells us today. He is the bread of life. In Jesus' part of the world, just like in Ethiopia today, bread was not just the carbohydrate part of the meal, it was how all food came into your mouth. In effect, Jesus is saying he is the spoon and fork which conveys the food to you. Without the bread in Ethiopia, you do not eat anything. Without Jesus, you have no sustenance. This is a big claim for him to make. He is saying that without him, you have no life at all. God can surround you with love, life, health, etc., but without Jesus to bring it to you, you would be famished. He is that which brings the freely given life itself to you. When you go to that Ethiopian restaurant, ask the proprietor to explain this saying to Jesus to you. See if his or her face does not light up.