

Gospel lesson

Once again, we pick up where we left off in the Gospel of John last week, as Jesus concludes speaking about the bread of life.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-stoning-threat/>

John 6:56-69

(NRSV)

⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

⁵⁸ This 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."

⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?"

⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

⁶⁴ But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him.

⁶⁵ And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.

⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's Time>

<Hymn "Standing on the Promises"

UMH #374

Message: Sent Out to Live



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/fourteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fourteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty God who gives us purpose in life,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may always share Your grace wherever we may
go or be, and let Your holy power work through us;
in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are still in the "Worship with Rejoicing" series:
"If you...thought that...last week [was the end] of
this series since it focused on benediction—SURPRISE!
The benediction isn't the end of worship—nor is it
the end of this series—because worship does not end
when the gathered Body of Christ disperses."¹

<Interactive Time>



picture from MMMS collection

Where do you find God? <Let them respond>

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/fourteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes>.

When I was camping, I felt a lot of personal connection with God through nature – sunsets, landscapes, critters (even the raccoons that woke us up clambering around our little barbecue grill). On Sunday, I went to the Saranac Lake UMC to worship at the church where my mother-in-law first accepted Jesus as her Savior, after a friend invited her along – arguably leading to my being pastor here today.

How many of you here remember church in the 50's and 60's? What was it like? [<Let them respond>](#)



picture from MMMS collection

There were more children attending in those days. I think I was the youngest person in the building in Saranac Lake UMC; with a large retirement population in their community, they have chosen to focus on that segment of the population, leaving youth outreach other churches in the town more equipped for it.

Assessing abilities versus community needs is important for prioritizing ministry efforts, which they have done. Yet while I sat with them at coffee, I was asked what they should be doing to improve.

What do you think I told them? [<Let them respond>](#)

I essentially told them, as I have said here, that the church needs to get involved with the community and establish relationships so that we can share the

Word of God more effectively.

Where do you share God (and how)? <Let them respond>



picture from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2c/Model_of_Solomon%27s_Temple_-_04.jpg

In the Old Testament reading, we heard Solomon dedicating the temple he built to the God of Israel, and asking God to come dwell within it. It was impressive and beautiful in its day; the psalmist sang about how lovely it was. Solomon was even magnanimous enough to ask that foreigners who prayed there would have their prayers answered.

Solomon's expectation was clearly that the people would have to come to this location for God to heed their prayers, even as he noted that God could not be contained. As I read it, I get a sense that Solomon wanted to be in control of who had access to God's ear. The king even claimed credit for building the house with "I," not "we," but it was never just him.

In this sin-filled world, we look at physical structures dedicated to holiness and say, "That is where we can meet God" – and we are not wrong, for God comes to us where our hearts are open, and as a group we open our hearts together in these spaces set aside for worship more readily than in other places such as the gas station or sporting events.

But God is not contained in or limited to these spaces. It is not for anyone aside from God to control with whom God will connect, where, or how.

The Word of God is the source of all life. Jesus is that Word, who walked among the people for a time.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-jesus-father/>

He said that we have to eat His flesh and drink His blood to live. People assumed it was His physical body – like their own – that He meant they had to consume. Evidently horrified (as I would be) at the idea of His asking them to become cannibals and eat Him, many turned away. So Jesus clarified a few moments later by saying, “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

He was not saying that our physical bodies are bad, just that they were misunderstanding Him. Much as a building does not contain God but provides a focus through which we can encounter God when we open our hearts in worship, the physical elements of Jesus’ body and blood are a focus for us to encounter and partake of His Spirit: the Word, the source of all life. God is present there because we come in faith.

We must not fall into Solomon's trap of thinking the physical limits our relationship with God. We sing about how "the church is the people." If we partake of Jesus, internalize the Word within us, then we carry Him with us when we leave this place and go into the world. If we want to live, we need to share that grace with others as well.

When Jesus asked the twelve if they wished to go away too, Peter replied, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Other translations say, "to whom shall we go?" That can be read as Peter asking where Jesus would send them, to do His work.

We should be constantly asking our Lord the same, to whom would He have us go? Where are we to bring awareness of the presence of God into others' lives?

The Holy Spirit is with us every moment of our lives. Sin distracts us from noticing the presence and blessings of God in our lives. It is so pervasive that Paul wrote about putting on holy armor to protect ourselves from the evil constantly attacking our souls. So put it on!



images from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/btbm-armor/>

† Belt on truth,

- † cinch the breastplate of righteousness around you,
- † fasten your footwear to walk in peace,
- † hold up your faith as a shield against naysayers,
- † bear the helmet of salvation for all to see, and
- † brandish/wave the sword of the Spirit -
use the Living Word to defeat evil in your life and
to enable people to see God.

All of you, go out as God's temple into the world, to serve where and with whom God sends you, guided through prayer. Worship God in all you do, living your faith that, by that, others may find life in Christ because of you. Before you go, let us practice what to tell people by reciting: