

Worship on the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

10:00 am August 23, 2026

Minister: The Rev. Brad Childs

Service led by Romulus Rhoad Music Director: Binu Kapadia

Vocalist: Linda Farrah Basford Welcoming Elder: Heather Tansem

Reader: Judy Smith

We gather to worship God

Music Prelude

Greeting

L: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

P: and also with you

Lighting of the Christ candle

Welcome and announcements

Preparation for worship

Call to worship

L: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

P: All things were created through him, and without him was not anything created that was created.

L: In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

P: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5)

*Opening praise: *I lift my eyes up*

Prayer of approach

Holy God, we thank and praise you for this wonderful day which you have created for us as a steadfast reminder of your everlasting love. The heavens shine brightly, proclaiming your glory. With the life that you have given to us all, let us live in and for your love, sustained by your grace.

We praise and thank you for your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, a gift we can never hope to match, but a gift, thanks to your love, that you give to us.

Lord, we recognize however, that we are not perfect, that we are unable to perfectly reflect your infinite love so we pray these words.

Prayer of confession (Based on Psalm 51)

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love: according to your abundant mercy blot out our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and sustain in us a willing spirit. Amen.

Response: *I waited, I waited on you Lord*

Assurance of God's pardon

Brothers and sisters, hear the good news! "*I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*" We can trust in the mercy of God: in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven! (Isaiah 43:25)

Musical offering: Warren Garbutt and Jack Brown

We listen for the voice of God

<i>Jesus we are gathered</i>	514
<i>Children's time and the Lord's Prayer</i>	535



*Song: *Fairest Lord Jesus* 375

Scripture: John 6:41-71 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Response: *Behold the lamb of God!*

Message: *Spirit and Truth*

I'll admit to you all today I decided to pick a hard reading. One of the passages from John for which Christians have constantly been in conflict over for centuries, if not from when Jesus himself uttered these words.

The conflict is not over if this particular passage refers to Holy Communion, it is rather how and to what degree it does. If you ask any of the Reformers of the Protestant Reformation or their Roman Catholic counterparts, and they will answer in many different ways.

Thanks to the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church argues that this passage refers to the body and blood of Christ literally being essentially (in the philosophical sense) but not accidentally (also in the philosophical sense) the body and blood of Christ. Thus the Bread and Wine of the Mass are the true body and blood of Christ, transubstantively changed by the words of institution and power of the validly ordained priest from mere bread and wine into the same essence of Christ's divine body. This is later termed, transubstantiation.

Martin Luther partially disagreed with this. He actually did believe that the consecrated bread was the body and blood of Christ, but that how it exactly became God's body and blood was a mystery. Later scholars name his view, consubstantiation.

Now the reformer Ulrich Zwingli, who I imagine only a few of you heard, utterly disagreed with Luther on this point. He pointed to that quote I put on the bulletins. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." For centuries this is literally the passage that prevented us in the reformed tradition from being fully together with the Lutherans. You see, Zwingli argued that what Jesus says here indicates that everything he just said, is meant to be taken in the more memorialist sense of the Lord's Supper. It is not in any way God's body or blood that we eat when we partake in Communion. In his argument with Luther he almost seems to deny the true existence of anything spiritual, and that did anger a lot of people at the time. But it left a mess between those who agreed more with Luther in Wittenburg, and those who agreed more with Zwingli in Zurich.

This is why it is interesting to see how John Calvin the famous Reformed theologian, and his friend Philip Melanchin, a Lutheran theologian and student of Martin Luther tried to bridge this gap. They proposed this, what if this passage (which everyone at the time agreed referred to communion) does mean that when we eat the Communion bread and drink the wine we do eat Christ's body and blood. Not in the mysterious way semi-literal Luther suggested, nor in a purely in our heads memorial remembrance way that Zwingli argues. They argued that we do eat of Christ's body and blood, but spiritually. They argue that while we eat it, we are spiritually lifted up to "God's body" in the heavenly sense by the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps it's best summarized in the words of the Catechism for Today Question 83: "The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist is eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Christ's body broken and his blood shed for us, in anticipation of his joyous return. The cup is sharing in Christ's blood and the bread is a sharing in his body. The real presence of Christ does not come through some change in the bread and wine (as the Lutherans and Catholics believe) or through Christ being in or under the elements, but rather we are lifted up into the presence of

Christ by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.” This is Calvin’s view of this sacrament. This understanding of communion is known as Spiritual presence.

This argument is interesting as it does seem to align a bit more with John 6:63, that the words Jesus shares with us is not of a physical thing that magically changes the bread and wine into something else, but rather as we believe as we partake of it, we ingest the spiritual body and blood of Christ. In Remembrance but not in a purely memorial fashion. Indeed, we really do something when we partake in communion. We honestly could probably, just like Luther and Zwingli, spend several weeks arguing over how exactly, metaphysically, this works, or we could perhaps see what Jesus was primarily discussing in this passage. Christian unity.

Holy Communion is the sacrament, on which we all are reminded of this simple truth. God with us. God who seeks our good. God who became one of us, has never left us. Maybe that’s why I really do gravitate towards spiritual presence, because it is the idea that God is definitively still with us, visibly in the act of communion.

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” (John 6:56) It seems to me that perhaps the larger point of which Jesus sought to make in this speech. Is that he will remain among us, even after he is gone physically.

“Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

What is Jesus saying to us here? Perhaps even when we cannot see God, that does not mean that he is not present. Whether it’s in this long-winded argument over bread, or even when it’s when we watch the news, when we see pain and evil everywhere. In our own lives, in the lives of our friends and our families. Communion at bare minimum is the definitive reminder, that is God is still with us. But Jesus is that definitive reminder, the full argument, that God is with us.

No matter how you shake the words of this text, that is without any argument, the main point Jesus makes here. He is sent from God. He is God. He is from before the creation of the world. He knows all, even who will betray him. And he chose the twelve, and he chose us. Despite whom we are, despite what we have done to ourselves, to others, or what others did to us, God loves us still.

He reminds us with these words, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51)

So the argument that this passage does not refer to Communion is correct in the sense that this passage is not primarily focused on communion. Eating the bread is not only taking part in communion. Is it not obvious what Jesus means by “eating his flesh?”

Jesus says these words, “The flesh is no help at all,” how are we to take these words? But from the long discussion Jesus gives, in which “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” and further, “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” It becomes more apparent what flesh he is referring to. Human works, that is the “flesh” that will not guarantee or merit our way into heaven. Human

works are the things that we do for the sake of God, things we do reflecting the light, the love that God gives to us is what we ought to be doing. These “fleshly things” in themselves do not merit our way up to God, but convict us, remind us, teach us how we are to live and love each other.

So we, the people of God, those in the ‘flesh of Jesus’ the bread of God- ought to be doing these things. We should be living examples of the blessings that he has given to us. Helping each other, not just in our own church community, but in our whole community, friends, families, neighbours, the less fortunate. And even our enemies, people we personally do not like. We are to help them and show to them the love that God has for the entire world.

This is what Paul is speaking of in 1 Corinthians. To the Greeks, this idea of the flesh being a good thing was an absolute stumbling block.

They were used to gods who in their myths at best held humans in contempt as lesser beings, freely destroying human lives at their own pleasure. The many gods of the Greeks do not ask for love or help for others or their communities. They ask for total submission, and regular sacrifices. Which ironically it was believed that they depended on, lest they wrathfully destroy civilization for lack of piety. This is what fueled a lot of religious backlashes against Christians in the latter days of the Roman Empire. It was widely argued, even in Imperial Edicts, that the gods were angry with the Roman Empire for not being pious enough, for not giving enough sacrifices to their local temple. Lack of works resulted in bad things. The kosmos had to be kept in balance.

Other Greek philosophers like Plato rejected this view. He believed in the existence of a single god that ruled over all the world. But Plato argued this one god must necessarily remain totally apart from the world in order to preserve its perfection. Plato and his students could not conceive of this idea of God taking on “the flesh”. Flesh which they considered to be the very thing which exemplified human imperfection. To them taking on flesh would make the perfect God just like their imperfect gods. When Zeus and other so-called gods take on flesh in Greek myths, they perform countless acts of depravity. I’ll spare you the details, you are free after the service to look them up. This stumbling block is why many could not accept Jesus’ claim to be God. How could perfection lower itself into imperfection? Isaiah 55:8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.” Perhaps Martin Luther’s point on emphasizing the mystery of God is not a bad one. But we can at least say this. God indeed loves us. A God who does not love his creation would not lower himself into our “imperfect flesh”. A God who cares little for humanity would have no qualms about doing terrible things in the flesh, like being a mighty conquering King, as some people had hoped for. “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 ESV) Paul is right here. Jesus isn’t perfect in the estimation of the Greek philosophers, but that is the

imperfect wisdom of mortal men. God clearly has never been playing by our rules, or according to how we thought the rules were supposed to work. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

God be praised. Amen.

*Song: *Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine* 687

We respond to serve God

Our time of giving

L: Heavenly Father, we praise you for all blessings flow from you. In response to the love and grace you have shown the world, the love that you have given to us for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Let us give back what we are able to your glory, and proclaim your love to our neighbours and the entire world. We pray all these things, in our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

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Prayer of gratitude, and for others and ourselves

For church, city of Edmonton, province of Alberta, Canada, world
Personal health, health of family, pain and grieving
For joys, for good food, for friends, for family, for fellowship

*Song: Word of God, across the ages 497

Sending out with God's blessing – Jude 24-25

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Response: *Sing Amen*

Music postlude

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