

**Sentence**

Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God.

**Collect**

Almighty God, we are taught by your word  
that all our doings without love are worth nothing.  
Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts  
that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God now and for ever. Amen.

**The Word of God:**

**First Kings 8:22-30, 41-43**

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands to heaven. He said “ O Lord, God of Israel there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, ‘There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your work be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant’s prayer and his pleas, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the

foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

### **Psalm 84**

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Happy are those who lie in your house, ever singing your praise.

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.

They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!

Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

### **Ephesians 6:10-20**

Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

### **John 6:56-69**

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 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.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

### **Sermon:**

Peter says it perfectly, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” And isn’t that just what we might be saying today?

The disciples find themselves discombobulated with all that is taking place around them. Jesus their prophet, leader and teacher is talking crazy. Teaching indecipherable things about eating human flesh—his flesh, and drinking blood. Mosaic law absolutely forbids the consuming of blood—any kind of blood, even that

of animals. Period. And as to eating human flesh—unthinkable in many, many cultures, most certainly that of the Hebrews. Then Jesus goes on to push them a little bit more, asking about what they would do if they saw the “Son of Man ascending to where he was before”. John reports that many of his disciples found this much too confusing and difficult, so they turned back and “no longer went about with him (Jesus)”. Not really surprising at all under the circumstances. I certainly empathize with them. It is hard, extremely hard, to accept when someone or something you trust and believe, veers off from that which is the widely accepted and agreed upon norms; from the very things that make your faith tradition, culture and society what they are.

It is fair to say that right now we are undergoing something like that of those early disciples. In the last few years we have watched the MeToo movement arising out of centuries of systematic domination, and violence against women. The Black Lives Matter movement is shining a spot-light on racial abuse and injustice through the lens of recent murders, like that of George Floyd, perpetrated by the very same people whose job it is to protect human life. This COVID pandemic has caused havoc in our daily lives and shown us just how vulnerable we are in relation to the power and might of natural forces.

We too have been pushed even farther. The uncovering of hundreds of unmarked graves of school children right here in our country beggars belief for many of us. It has left us speechless before the misguided thinking of our own culture and our churches’ participation in its harsh and cruel enactment. We are broken-hearted, yet guilty, by way of our privilege position in the dominant culture. Like those disciples we are confused, distressed, and feel pushed too far. As one author suggests, we have reached the point when we don’t know what to do with our pain anymore.

So friends what shall we do and where shall we go from here? Do we turn our backs and no longer ‘go about with each other’? Shall we disassociate ourselves from our church and our faith tradition? Shall we too walk away from Jesus? I suggest Peter’s response is exactly what we need to think about today.

History tells us that every age has its pain and its spirituality. What marks each age is what is done with that pain. Therefore a very fundamental question for us right now is what we do with our pain? Do we continue with this pain; do we grieve and weep? Do we remember that is exactly what Jesus did when he received the news that his friend Lazarus had died? Jesus also wept when he gazed upon the Temple at Jerusalem built by Solomon, knowing that it would be, in the near future, destroyed and reduced to rubble by human powers and principalities. Jesus accepted the pain of his trial, conviction, and crucifixion, even though they were the result of the misguided. In this Jesus shows us exactly what to do. We stay with the pain and suffering and we grieve for the lost children and for the families who suffer. We pray for new life for the communities searching for healing.

Now what about church? It is after all one of the very agents of this grief. It has been laid at our doorsteps—the church has injured and damaged. We can no longer wonder at its stained-glass splendours without looking at its dark corners. So we have a choice to make. We who have more choices open to us than any previous generation must decide if, why, and how we will carry on.

A most valuable point of Jesus' teaching in our Gospel reading today can easily get overlooked. Jesus came in the flesh and invited us to participate in his incarnation! In fact "the whole of the gospel, is about the Word becoming flesh; not the Word becoming an idea, a spirituality, a feeling, or an experience." (N.T. Wright) I believe all of us need to have God not just in our heads, but also in our hands, our feet, and our bodies. The tangible nature of the bread and the wine invites us to touch, smell, and taste God in the stuff of every day life again. Following Jesus isn't meant to simply be believed; it is meant to be lived, shared, eaten, spoken and enacted in the presence of other people. In spite of its failings, the gathered community we call church, has something unique and precious to offer—the Eucharistic meal with its constant revelation of God's love for the world. So just as Jesus came in flesh, bone and blood, to launch God's kingdom here on earth, so too we become the hands and feet of Jesus acting in God's world and for God's purposes.

Mindful of the problems, setbacks, and misguided efforts, God's purpose will come through. Those of us willing to be God's humble, prayerful, and faithful people will be the people who respond to God's calling right here, right now. Will you be there when the time comes to join together again and partake of the Jesus body and blood? It is your choice.

May God bless us all. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People:**

In God's presence we give thanks for

- the many blessings in our lives, including our family, friends, neighbours and community.
- for the safety, peace and abundance we enjoy.
- the faith that is in us and the love that surrounds us.

In God's presence we pray for

- victims of violence, cruelty, and abuse. And for their families and communities.
- victims of poverty, racism, sexism and other systems of injustice.
- those suffering from sickness and poor health.
- the people of Haiti, Afghanistan and other places of disaster.
- those who live with loss and grief and for those who have died. May they rest in the peace and light of God's love.

**Blessing:**

May God bless us;  
the Creator working constantly through change,  
the Christ who came to share and change our lives,  
the Spirit moving in the world and changing it.

May God bless us,  
here and now, and for all eternity. Amen.