

## 10-06-2024 Words of Worship

### **Morning Prayer –**

Dear God, our lives are full and rich and busy. We thank you for the array of involvements and activities we can choose to be apart of and we pray that in each one we would be able to reflect your love and be examples of Jesus.

We're grateful for the events of last weekend, for those who worked so hard to make it all happen, for the many people who attended and, especially, for the forebears whose faith and courage brought them here as immigrants. We pray, God, for your continued presence with us here, in this place. Guide us to be faithful stewards of the land and of *all* that we have to be responsible for. Help us to be mindful of those who lived here and cared for the land even before our forebears' arrival; give us wisdom and courage as we consider our interactions with them. We thank you, God, for all activities of this weekend – the Harvest festival here in Goessel, the Fall Fest activities at Bethel and Homecoming activities at Hesston, the items collected and shared for the Tabor Food Pantry and the Harvest Giving Walk today. We have many reasons to celebrate and be generous and grateful.

We pray your continued guidance and blessing on the meetings and decisions that are unfolding here at Alexanderwohl in the transition work and pastoral search process. Be with us as we meet together two weeks from today to continue learning and discerning together. Be with John as he gives congregational leadership and with the deacons and all of us as we listen for the wisdom of your Spirit.

We thank you, God, for the birth of Eden Friedberg to Kendra and Kevin on Friday morning. She joins her siblings Levi and Aubryn and grandparents Dwight and Tammy Flaming. Bless this family as they adjust to a new and precious member.

We pray for Kim Voth and her parents as they continue on this journey of faithfulness through cancer treatments and other health issues for Jolynn. Be their source of comfort, strength and courage and give each of them what they need for each day.

There is much suffering and pain in this world, O God. Be present with those who are reeling from the destruction of Hurricane Helene – its damage reached places that were not thought possible for a hurricane. Give humanity eyes to see and hearts to comprehend messages the earth is sending as it groans and heaves under the weight of unreasonable demands.

We pray for those in Israel, Palestine, Gaza, Lebanon... as the violence continues to broaden we continue to claim that the way of Jesus is the way to true peace. We pray for that way to be made known and that we would find ways to share that message and advocate for those innocents who suffer in the midst of the violence. Be with those who are on the ground working to relieve the suffering, that your mercy be shown and your justice prevail. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Offering Prayer** – Thank you God, for your provision and love. Open our heart and hands to BE your hands and feet in this world. Bless these gifts and those who’ve given them, to your glory and the work of your kingdom. Amen.

**Scripture** – Exodus 16:2-4; 9-15 and Matthew 25:34-46

**Message** -- Asking, “What’s for dinner?” Pastor Lois Harder

I don’t know how it is at your house, but at my house (especially when my children were home), the question, “What’s for dinner (or supper)?” was rarely just an innocent, information gathering inquiry. The question was often loaded with a hint of discontentment that sometimes led directly to an outright complaint. That, in turn, was often met by me with a large helping of tired sarcasm that ranged from “Well, you know where the peanut butter jar is” to “Why don’t you call one of your friends and see what they’re having – maybe you can invite yourself over.”

Complaining in the midst of having enough seems to be a human response that’s been going on since at least the time of the Exodus. But did the congregation of Israelites out in the wilderness really have “enough”? How do we know what’s “enough” – who decides that? And what are they basing their decision on? I mean, these folks were comparing their need for food in the wilderness of liberation to what they had in Egypt when they were enslaved. They were considering the benefits of their own demise in Egypt by the hand of the Lord as they recalled “sitting by the fleshpots” – not even eating the meat...just smelling it – while they “ate their fill of bread”. It was as if they were saying, “Sure, we were enslaved, but at least we had plenty of bread!” What happened to their faith and trust in Yahweh, their deliverer and their God?

And the question could be posed the other way around – what happened to Yahweh’s faith in the people? After all, it seems like the covenant was tested both ways. The people complained and looked back rather than forward. And Yahweh’s response could be heard as a little bit of tired sarcasm. You want bread? I’ll give you bread... “I’m going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people will go out and gather (*just*) enough for that day. In that way I’ll test them, whether they’ll follow my instruction – or not.” The covenant was still a bit tenuous, so the trust was still being built. God gave instructions to Aaron, through Moses letting the people know that God heard and validated their concerns, and would provide for them. So, in the evening the quails appeared – in abundance! They “covered the camp”! And in the morning they found this filmy, flaky stuff on the ground and like children, they asked, “What is it?” And Moses patiently explained, in so many words, “It’s your daily bread.” It’s what God has provided for you. It’s a sign that God has heard you and has responded in love and with provision, offering you what you need, honoring the covenant. Your grumbling and complaints have been answered in order for you to know God.

In the Old Testament, knowing something is not so much about intellect or knowing in a rational, provable way. It’s much more experiential, embedded in the emotions. In the world of the ancient Hebrews, “Knowing” was about intimacy, concern, communication and mutuality. “To know the Lord” in this context means to witness or experience, up close and personal, the active, saving, comforting work of the Divine in one’s life. They were hungry, they cried out to God and

God provided food for them. The food wasn't necessarily what they were used to or what they wanted or even what they recognized, but it was daily and it was enough.

Last week we heard about the kinds of foods that our immigrant forebears had on their wilderness journey... I can imagine there may have been times when they looked back at the life they left and questioned their decision. I can imagine some hungry, rumbling tummies, some children being offered a very hard rascheatwieback – a toasted swieback that has a much longer “shelf life” than fresh bread, but if you don't have coffee or milk to dip it in it can be very hard on your teeth and it doesn't have a lot of flavor left in it. And I can imagine the question, “What is it?” And I can imagine the response, “It's what God has provided, and it's enough. It's enough to sustain us and for us to know God, to experience God with us, caring for us, providing what we need.”

By the time we get to the Gospel of Matthew, in God's grand story, God has made a new covenant. By this time God has sent Jesus to show people how to live out God's love and provision and care. Jesus taught us that our salvation comes by how we treat other people. Not just by grace or by what we believe, but by how well we love. And the assignment is not simply to love those who love us or to care for those in our families or close circles of friends; it is to see the face of God in everyone and especially in those the rest of the world has thrown away or calls weak or vulnerable. The new covenant is that God's people will care for those who are hungry or thirsty when they're migrating from a place of fear or oppression to a place of safety and liberation. God's people will make welcome those who are in a strange land and without friends or resources. God's people will help to provide what is needed.

But here's a kicker in Matthew's Gospel. Before we get to chapter 25, we've read in chapter 5 that Jesus followers are to turn the other cheek and walk the second mile. We've read in chapter 6 that we are to resist storing up treasure on earth. In chapter 10 we read that we'll be sent out into the world like sheep into the midst of wolves and that we'll likely experience hunger, poverty and possibly even imprisonment when we follow Jesus faithfully. So... what if we sometimes find ourselves as “the least of these” in need of help and support? By definition, Christ-followers are always both receivers of the good news of the gospel and witnesses to it. We are called to hear the cries of those around us and respond and it's possible that we might also be the ones crying. Each of us is both unbeliever and believer, both commanded to care and in need of care, both judged by the Son of Man and identified with him in our weakness, we're judged for our failures to pursue justice and we're saved by grace. We are all, at one time or another, both a goat and a sheep.

And so, this morning, as we humbly think about World Food Day and the fact that food is a human right and a blessing from God, we have so many opportunities to share with those in need – through the Tabor Food Pantry, the New Hope Shelter, the Kansas Food Bank, through Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service, through showing hospitality to others in our own homes.

At the same time, we have many opportunities to receive nourishment – through meals together in each others' homes, here at church at midweek suppers, the nourishment of meaningful conversations and the sharing of life together, studying the Bible and sharing prayers with one

another. A significant way to receive God's nourishment is to take Communion together and call to mind the love of Jesus for each of us and for the world.

As you come to the Lord's table, I invite you to partake of the good news of your salvation; you are made in God's image and loved beyond measure. And you are invited to receive that love and also to share it generously with the world.

### **Communion –**

As we come to the Table this morning, we see just a tiny representation of different kinds and varieties of bread – a reminder of Christians all around the world, joined together today in this act of remembering Jesus and bringing us together in our common love for him and desire to follow him in our lives.

This Table is open to all who know and love Jesus and who want to follow him.

As we prepare ourselves to receive the bread and the juice, I invite you to turn to number 936 for words that can help us to focus our attention...

*At the table of Christ, we eat this bread and drink this cup to remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, to be united with Christ and with one another as the church, and to look toward a time when all will be one. As we eat and drink with thanksgiving, Jesus Christ is present with us and we are empowered by the Spirit to follow Jesus' way of love as the body of Christ, broken and blessed for the life of the world.*

**Song of Response –** VT 474, All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving –**

O God, with deep gratitude, we thank you for this moment, this meal, this congregation and for your children everywhere. Having tasted your goodness, let us share your peace. Send us out, to live as your people, ordinary people that you have called to follow you, to share your love, to live for you as people of this earth and citizens of your kingdom. Amen. *(return to your seats.)*

**Song of Sending –** VT 710 This is My Song

**Benediction –** Go now, to live as God's people, ordinary people that have been called to follow in the way of Jesus – to share his love, to live as your people on this earth and as citizens of your kingdom. Amen.