

## Script Worship Resources - *Graceful*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG2bZfIFWfk>

**Pentecost 11, Year B,**

8<sup>th</sup> August 2021

**Ephesians 4:25-5:2 NRSV / John 6:35, 41-51 NRSV**

### **Prelude**

### **Welcoming Guests/Announcements**

### **Pass the Peace**

**Opening Music**      *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,  
the King of Creation!* (lyric video)

St. Peter's and St. James Church, Hereford

<https://youtu.be/APVxKnENCjo>

### **Call to Worship**

Only the hungry search for bread. Only the thirsty look for water. This is a place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.

Only those who ache for meaning will pursue it. Only those who yearn for a deeper life will seek it. This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.

So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst, our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings, and let the God of life satisfy our souls.

### **Invocation**

Holy God, Creator of Life, you call us out of our dark places, offering us the grace of new life. When we see nothing but hopelessness, you surprise us with the breath of your spirit. Call us out of our complacency and routines, set us free from our self-imposed bonds, and fill us with your spirit of life, compassion, and peace, In the name of Jesus, your anointed one, we pray. **Amen.**

## **Epistle Reading      Ephesians 4:25-5:2 NRSV**

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.

Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,<sup>[a]</sup> as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,

and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.<sup>[b]</sup>

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,

and live in love, as Christ loved us<sup>[c]</sup> and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God

## **Special Music Video      *As If The Flowers Knew***

words and music by Mike Stern, used with permission

[https://youtu.be/AM7BrrHY0Uo?fbclid=IwAR1jwvqfc\\_ahh6exJEAQ7ONkHkzhX8H6HZ7gPyjLi33-vDrJS4JTd2FV0c](https://youtu.be/AM7BrrHY0Uo?fbclid=IwAR1jwvqfc_ahh6exJEAQ7ONkHkzhX8H6HZ7gPyjLi33-vDrJS4JTd2FV0c)

## **A Time of Prayer**

## **Joys and Concerns**

## Pastoral Prayer

The word angel originally meant “messenger.” For God’s angels on this earth,  
**let us now pray.**

We thank you, loving God, that you do not leave us without helpers. thank for your special agents, those guardian angels—both human and heavenly—who never cease to care.

Wherever there are situations of confusion, where doubts proliferate and anxieties spawn, please send in your angels of light.

Wherever people are crippled by guilt, or deeply regret damage to others which they can never rectify, send in your angels of mercy.

Wherever there is arrogance and deceit, corruption and rapacious greed, send in your fiery angels of judgement.

Wherever ignorance reigns or superstition cripples individuals or communities, please send in your angels of truth.

Wherever persons or nations become obsessed with aggression, or resort to terrorism and warfare, send in your agents of peace and goodwill.

Wherever families are at loggerheads, or in the workplace folk feel alienated from one another, send in your angels of reconciliation.

Wherever people see their future as bleak or dangerous, and fall into the trap of inertia or despair, please send in your angels of hope.

Wherever the church becomes exclusive, or gets caught up in its own regulations, traditions, or inflexible dogma, send in your angels of reformation.

Wherever ministers lose their passion for the Gospel, or congregations become self-satisfied or apathetic, please send in your angels of rebuke.

Wherever there are people who are afflicted by disease or injured in accidents, struggle against mental ills or suffer from criminal violence, send in your angels of healing.

Wherever the dying endure fears or pain, and the bereaved either shed the hot tears of a fresh grief or endure the long-term loss of a partner or friend, send in your angels of comfort.

Loving God, Lord of all the messengers of grace on earth and in heaven, hear our prayers and enlist us, please God, within the ranks of your caring angels.

Through Jesus Christ your only True Son, our Saviour and our inspiration. Amen

## **Gospel Lesson      John 6:35, 41-51 NRSV**

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves."

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

## **Message – *Graceful***

When we complain, what is it that drives us? What makes us grumpy and vocal about our discontent? If we give it some thought, most of the time, grumbling is the result of a reality that fails to meet our expectations. We eat out at our favorite restaurant, and when the dish arrives that we have been craving, it is not up to the quality we expect. We leave in plenty of time, according to our Google directions, then find traffic is much worse than Google's all knowing mind predicted. Living in West Seattle, I know that frustration all too well. In these situations, it can also be too easy to find someone to blame, can't it? We blame the server for not ordering or delivering our food correctly, or we blame bad drivers for causing the traffic predicaments we find ourselves in. When events unfold that fall short of our hopes, and when we can locate a person or situation to blame, we complain.

In our reading from John this morning, some of those following Jesus find themselves in this situation. Some in the crowd had very detailed expectations of what their messiah would be, and they are now finding their expectations are not matching the reality they are presented with. It is natural to draw parallels between the people in this passage and the Israelites who complained in the wilderness, whom Jesus references in his response. In both cases, people had targeted the person who they felt to blame for their hunger; so they unleashed their complaints. However, in this case, the people are questioning Jesus not only out of hunger, but out of confusion. They are struggling to reconcile the messenger with his message. They cannot come to terms with the fact that this Jesus, who is uttering profound words of wisdom, is the very same Jesus they have known since his childhood. In a sense, they are getting caught up in the same great christological controversies that will later captivate the early church: how can this Jesus be both human and divine?

I am reminded of a conversation I once had with a lifelong member of a congregation I once served. He rarely missed a Sunday, served on numerous committees, and raised his children to be active participants in the church. Yet he rarely read the Bible and had never attended a bible study. His reason? The stories are too antiquated, the language too cryptic, and the meaning much too confusing for his analytical mind. Ironically, he shared this with me and others while sitting in the first session of his very first bible study. He shared his feelings with earnest concern and without complaint. I thought at that moment of the number of people struggling with the confusing elements of the faith who have responded in a way that is much more negative than the way this church member did.

If we think about it, I'm sure we all can picture those in our community who would rather be anywhere but in church on Sundays, because they think Christianity is too far-fetched to believe. Think even of those you have known in the congregation over the years who are reluctant to live a fully committed life of discipleship, because they cannot seem to take Christian theology and practice seriously.

Jesus' response to those in the crowd with complaints is appropriately cryptic. As is often the case in the Gospels, he decides not to address their question directly, but answers a different question altogether. He chooses not to explain how he could be both fully human and fully divine. He does not choose to engage in formal debate regarding what would later be called the christological controversy. Instead he speaks to the issue that was of real importance, the deeper issue affecting his inquisitors, whether they realize it or not: the relationship between the grace of God and human will. "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me," Jesus says. He offers them the compelling notion that they would not even be there in their state of confusion, pressing for answers, working out their struggles with the faith, were it not for the grace of God that has been operating in and through them. Their state of confusion, which they have perceived as a stumbling block that evoked their complaints, is in fact a blessed reminder of how God is actively drawing them closer to Jesus.

Anne Lamott wrote that “the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty.” Sometimes our confusion can be like a fog that seems foreboding, gloomy, and dangerous. However, it can also force us to slow down, exercise caution, and rethink our priorities in the face of the unknown. It is true that no one can see the Father, Jesus acknowledges. There will always be things that we will not be able to fully comprehend. Nonetheless, Jesus reminds people that “all are taught by God.” We do not have to see God in order to be recipients of the grace of God.

It could very well be that the perplexing questions we bring to the table are the very evidence of God at work in us. From that perspective, to think we have it all worked out and have all the answers, is more a reflection of our own hubris, isn't it? Sadly, it isn't the confusion and questions, as much as the surety that has driven people away from the faith over the years. The debates and faith exploration of the early centuries of the church gave way to doctrine and orthodoxy.

I've often said the worst thing that ever happened to the church is when we became legit, and ingrained in the power structure, creating the rules and restrictions that go with such a position. Certainly it's helpful to agree on some basic tenets of faith, but to drill down and try to find a single acceptable answer to every faith question is not accepting the grace we are given by our Creator to have doubts, to reflect and study, and explore the mysteries of life and faith. Likewise, to apply our own understanding to others whose journey has taken them down a different path is not extending those same gifts of grace to others. Perhaps the prohibition against judging others found throughout the scriptures is meant to prevent us from refusing the gifts of grace and invitation that Jesus indicates are the work of God the Father.

In our reading from Ephesians this morning, we are told not to grieve the Spirit of God with anger and malice towards others, but to greet each other with love and understanding. In other words, extending the grace we've been given to others. How much are we truly “grace-full”? If we are truly honest with ourselves, which do we lean towards, complaint and frustration, or patience and grace? In our faith walks with others, do we give space for each to explore the questions they have, or do we expect them to fit our own understanding? For those who struggle to make sense of the more puzzling aspects of Christian theology, the conclusion of this passage is a suitable invitation to embrace the mysteries of the faith in the context of Christian community.

When we choose to share the journey with others and acknowledge our deepest questions, rather than complain about them, we discover that we are being “taught by God” and are recipients of a grace that has been at work since before we realized it, in the very confusion and questions we experience. Faith is more about doubt than certainty, as Lamott reminds us. May we all embrace the grace we've been given in the mysteries we experience, and continue to journey together exploring the questions, embracing the uncertainty and all its perspectives, in beloved community. May it be so, Amen.

## Call to Serve

Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love....may we give a fragrant offering (*Ephesians 5:1*). The fragrance of the bread of life rising and baking among us is a wonderful reminder of the new life which is arising in our beloved community. Let us give generously as we experience the fragrance of God's life rising in us.

**As we listen to the following music from Annie, let's reflect on what actions we can take this week to better share the gift of grace we've been given to others.**

## A Time for Reflection

Annie Center

## The Prayer of Thanksgiving

As we offer our gifts and lives in this moment, may we become imitators of you, Gracious God, who holds nothing back from us, but is generous and gracious with all that is yours. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Closing Music

***Amazing Grace*** (*Lyric Video*)

performed by Rosemary Siemans, used with permission

<https://youtu.be/g4X9QvjbYg>

## Benediction

Filled to the brim with the goodness of God; the nourishment of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, go now in peace to serve God in all that you think, do and say. God's peace will always be with you. AMEN.

## Postlude