

## Script Worship Resources - *Cleaning House*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1IUAWjPUFI>

**Pentecost 13, Year B,**

22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2021

**Joshua 24:1-2, 14-18 NRSV / John 6:56-69 NRSV**

### **Prelude**

### **Welcoming Guests/Announcements**

### **Pass the Peace**

### **Call to Worship** (Responsive)

One: How beautiful are the places where you dwell, O Lord!

**All: This house cannot contain your glory;  
even the heavens are bursting with the goodness of your presence!**

One: Happy are those who find their strength in you.

**All: Hear our prayers this day, Holy God,  
as we proclaim your praises to all the earth!**

### **Invocation**

It is good to be here in your presence, Lord. Here we are at home with each other and with you. Here we discover the joy of life and the strength to live each day with praise in our hearts to you.

You alone are God! You alone can show us the way to the life that lasts forever. We love you, Lord, and we lift this prayer in adoration of your holy name. **Amen.**

### **Opening Music (Video) *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart,***

words by George Croly, music by Frederick C. Atkinson,  
posted to YouTube by John Wesley Slider

<https://youtu.be/Meip3ckKIJl>

### **Old Testament Reading Joshua 24:1-2, 14-18 NRSV**

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God.

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.

“Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods;

for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed;

and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land.

Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

## Hymn

### ***Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer*** *(with lyrics)*,

Words by William Williams,

translated from the Welsh by Peter Williams,

music by John Hughes,

sung by the choir of St Michael and All Angels, Bassett

<https://youtu.be/ietK7-57iFY>

## Joys and Concerns

Robert Oberg following his stroke and Cathy and his family.

Jeremiah as he recovers from a stroke like condition.

Myrna as she settles into her new living situation.

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Multi-talented, Multi-tasking God! It is from You that we derive our creative instincts. We are makers and crafters, designers and builders of relationships and social systems, of ideas and projects, of agreements and policies, of tools and artworks.

Thank You that our lives are better for what has been made by hands and minds in our own generation and those older and younger.

Thank You for those whose skill and faith, time and money have brought into being houses of prayer; sanctuaries of worship.

Thank You for all the ways that cathedrals, temples, monasteries have served Your purposes, making visible a glimpse of Your glory and grandeur; moving people into an encounter with You; speaking of the longer story we are part of. Today we pray for our brothers and sisters across the world who long for the freedoms we take for granted – To worship together in a dedicated building, or anywhere.

Bring Your comfort and protection to those who have lost loved Ones and are themselves at risk of injury, torture or death because of objections and opposition to the faith they profess and practise.

We cry out to You for a world able to live and let live; a world able to celebrate the diverse strands of belief and ritual, affirming our common ground of treating others as we wish them to treat us.

Give us a curiosity for other ways of understanding You. Surprise us with the insights of other paths to You. You are Mystery, You are Intimacy, give Yourself to us that we may give ourselves to You, and bring alive Your kindness and compassion in all we do.

These and all the concerns we carry in our hearts today, we bring in Jesus' name. Amen

## **Gospel Reading      John 6:56-69 NRSV**

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.”<sup>[a]</sup>

## **Message – *Cleaning House***

So how good are you at getting rid of things? Do you keep a pretty tight ship, or do you have that closet or cupboard that you can just never seem to clear out? It seems to be a part of getting older. The longer we live, the more stuff we tend to accumulate. But it's not just “stuff” that is the problem. It's those possessions we have that have memories attached to them, that have sentimental value to us.: An old card received from a loved one long gone, a piece of jewelry passed on from someone of importance in our lives. It's a lot easier to keep a hold of things that we find comfort and security in than to let them go, isn't it? It's hard to make those kind of decisions. But it's just not those sentimental keepsakes that are tough to part with. There are many items in our lives that give us security, that remind us of better days in the prime of our lives.

We grow up with values that become guides in how we look at the world and that provide a measure of security for us as well. They keep us grounded. Often they inform our political positions and allegiances, as well as how we manage money, raise our children, in other words, many facets of our lives. They can be tied to our culture, our experiences, and the faith tradition in which we were raised or were a part of in our young adult years. Like our beloved treasures that gather dust around us, these too are things that we often find difficult to part with, or change, as we mature in life.

In our continuing story in John this week, we find the people who are following Jesus in Capernaum facing those same problems. Last week we talked about how visceral the imagery Jesus used in eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and how like in our physical bodies when we ingest nutrients our body needs, we discard those parts that have no use. Well, Jesus expands a little further on this thought this week. He tells the disciples that he abides in the Father, and through eating his flesh and drinking his blood, the disciples abide in him. We talked last week about the revulsion and blasphemy that the imagery of cannibalism and non-Kosher preparation would have caused his Jewish listeners but that wasn't the only offensive part. The relationship he is describing between his audience and the Divine is a radical departure from the religion and faith they would have been taught. Jewish theology is very individualistic. Your whole faith is based on your individual relationship with God. They had a cultural and religious identity as "God's people" but their whole faith was built on the choices you made as an individual, that you followed the rules, performed the required rituals and observances, and had an appropriate fear and reverence for a God that controlled your life, but that you were removed from.

Now Jesus is telling them that he is between God and them, and that by joining with him, they too abide with the Father. He's changing their faith from individualistic to communal. He's pulling the rug out from under those tenets of their faith that have kept them grounded and given them security for generations. It's important to note that he's not kicking those hallowed practices to the curb, but leading their focus away from those traditions being the path to true life. It proved to be too big a pill to swallow for many in the crowd that day. According to our reading, there were a great many following him to that point. After this little proclamation, the number dwindled to a core group of twelve. Yet the lesson doesn't just end with the audience in the biblical story.

The author of John also was addressing a Christian audience in the second century. Being the last of the Gospels to be written, the people hearing and reading this gospel would likely have been associated with an established congregation of Christians. By this time, the rituals of baptism and communion were already firmly established as central tenets of the faith pretty much across the Christian spectrum. John's message would have had a similar effect on them as well. Using such graphic language to describe the sacraments, as well as discounting the flesh in favor of the spirit, downplays the central role of those rituals to true relationship with God through Christ. Again, John doesn't suggest kicking them to the curb either, but stresses instead the importance of the relationship and community over the rituals themselves. After all, they are ordinances, rituals that Christ told us to emulate and repeat. The other three gospels include communion and baptism as ordinances, and John adds foot washing as well. But John indicates that they are to be outward

symbols of the relationship and communion they represent with God through Christ, led by the spirit.

As we think about our own faith, do we have a closet that needs to be cleaned out? What ritual or religious baggage are we carrying that needs to be discarded? Like in Jesus' time, the rituals and rules are not the problem so much as how they can affect our perspective, often to our own detriment.

There was a young man that attended school in a large north-eastern city. In his studies he fell in love with eagles. He read everything he could about eagles. He watched documentaries about eagles and the more he studied the more he loved eagles. He promised himself when he graduated college he would travel out west to observe the eagles in nature. He found a job teaching and saved his money all year. Summer came and he booked a flight to the area where eagles could be found. He rented a Jeep, took his camping gear and away he went in his search of eagle watching. He talked to locals and found a good area and he set up his camp site. He took his binoculars and telescope and set them up.

The next day the young man never saw any eagles. He traveled deeper into the cliff areas and he observed up the mountains. Finally the second evening he spotted a beautiful eagle soaring high in the sky. He watched where the eagle landed on the nest. Before the sun came up the man had moved where he could watch the eagles. His experience was much greater than he expected. For several days the young man watched the nest and the flight patterns of the eagle. He focused in on the nest and saw baby eaglets. One morning he was observing a male eagle soaring in the sky and to his amazement the eagle went into a dive and with great speed the eagle dipped beneath the tree line. In a few minutes the eagle was back soaring in the sky. All of a sudden the beautiful young eagle started free falling from the sky. The eagle was limp. It dropped from the sky at a high rate of speed. The young man started hiking to the area where the eagle had fallen to its death. When he arrived he found the dead eagle and attached to his chest was a dead weasel. Seems the eagle had swooped to the ground and had captured a weasel in his sharp talons. As the eagle started flying upwards the weasel had dug into the eagles chest and had dug the eagles heart out while in mid-flight as the eagle was clinging to the weasel --- he refused to let go. The eagle could have dropped the weasel to its death and then re-captured it for food. Hanging on to the weasel was sure death for the eagle. The young teacher stood over the lifeless body of the eagle and cried, "Eagle all you had to do was let go!... all you had to do to live was let go!"

Are we any better than the eagle in this story? Can we let go of those things that pull us away from Christ? Like the Jews in our biblical story and the early readers of John, we need to look at our traditions, our religion, and our rites and rituals. All those things that inform our opinions and behavior. Do they make us more like Jesus in our

behavior, our values, and our opinions and beliefs? Do they keep our focus on being a part of the holy community with Christ, with love as our primary focus, or do they turn our focus inward as individuals? Letting go of those treasured keepsakes can be difficult for sure, as it was for the eagle to let go of the weasel. But clearly there is a better choice to be made, isn't there? I hope and pray we have the courage and strength to let go of the weasels in our lives, and that we can muster the motivation to clean our spiritual closets so we can find the true life we are called to in a God who is love, through Christ who is the path to take us there. May it be so. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

As we think about how we can clean out the closets of our own spiritual lives, let's also give thought to how we may be the beloved community we are called to by our savior today. As Annie plays us a little interlude, let's reflect on what we can do as individuals, and as the body of Christ, to rid ourselves of those dusty old things we cling to in our lives, and how we can refocus on reflecting the light and love of Christ in everything we do, individually and together.

## **A Time for Reflection**

Annie Center

## **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

We give you all thanks and praise, O God, for you are the giver of honour and grace and we are eager for your presence with us.

The heavens and the earth cannot contain you for you have created them and hold them in your hand. And yet you dwell among your people and allow even the birds of the air to nest in your courts and honour you with their song.

You have sent your Holy One, Jesus Christ, to speak to us your word of Spirit and life. Though the forces of evil and death consumed him, he rose from the grave proclaiming your gospel of peace. Now he nourishes us for eternal life and arms us with truth, righteousness and salvation that we might stand firm against the corrupt spiritual powers that would tear down all who seek you with integrity.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high, we offer you thanks and praise at all times through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **HYMN**

### ***All Who Hunger Gather Gladly,***

featuring the St. Columba Singers,  
posted to YouTube by St. Columba's Episcopal Church

<https://youtu.be/dEJSJskgcb0>

## **Commissioning/Benediction**

No matter what boundaries and borders we have made, God transcends them all. God's love knows no measure, no limit. There is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. Know that you are forgiven, and called into the work of healing and hope, mercy and justice. Live into God's ways, and know that Christ is with you. Amen.