

## Pentecost 13 August 18, 2024 Annual Parish Picnic

All week long I have wondered if it will rain or not rain on our Parish Picnic today. The past few days, it has really looked like it will rain, but it has not. The forecast sometimes has rain, sometimes not, it just seems like a 50-50 tossup! And as I mentioned in a sermon in the aftermath of the flooding, while there is a prayer for rain in the prayer book, there is not a prayer for the rain to stop! I'm beginning to think that going forward, the next time we revise the prayer book, we should give a no rain prayer serious consideration. Especially as we find ourselves in the midst of this climate crisis, a warmer atmosphere that holds more moisture and that of course, leads to more rain as these systems run into our beautiful Green Mountains. The climate crisis has also lead to warmer ocean temperatures which in turn means stronger and more frequent tropical storms and hurricanes, which should not be a problem for us but you know...so any sort of prayer for no more rain will have to account for our failure to end (or even to slow down!) this climate crisis, and this is certainly one of those times when our prayerful actions will be even more meaningful than any words that come off our lips. So, as we gather on this day for our parish picnic, gathering here in the beauty of creation, may we be ever more resolved to preserve this beauty and the life of the planet that feeds and sustains our lives.

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, we come together this morning in this midst of your creation to hear your word and to seek your will for our lives. Grant that through the gifts we share today, we share your love with our neighbors. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

The Gospel lesson for today is about bread, which is probably an important thing for a Parish Picnic! Jesus speaks about the bread that will bring us eternal life. Rather strangely as well, Jesus equates this bread with his own body, which is a little weird if we take it literally. And of course, then there's the thing about his blood being the true drink, all of which sounds really strange. For John, of course, this is not strange in the slightest: God always provides for what we need; God provided for the ancestors, giving them bread from heaven, manna, to sustain the people on their journey from slavery to freedom. And now, even if the people cannot see it, Jesus is the bread they need: as John says at the beginning of his Gospel, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is God in our midst, God giving us life, God nourishing us as much as our daily bread, God sustaining our lives by God's own gracious gift. Indeed, good news for a picnic day! We will partake of all this wonderful food and

fellowship in a few minutes, but right now, there are deeper things afoot: we are here to be fed by God's grace, fed in Spirit, and this, this is what Christians have been doing for two thousand years. Since that night in the Upper Room, that last meal Jesus had with his friends, we gather in that same Spirit, to be fed by Jesus, fed with a bread that opens our souls to God's grace, that opens our lives in Christ's love. We have a cup and a plate, we have bread and wine, heck, we even have a dishtowel for cleaning up, at least that's what the stole I wear represents for us. Great things for a picnic meal together (but don't worry, Leo's cooking the burgers and hot dogs as we speak!)

And as the late night infomercials used to say, "But wait! There's more!" Yes, because we don't just eat together as Christians, we do something even better: we sing together! As the author of the Letter to the Ephesians reminds us, it is through singing together that we are filled with the Spirit, that we are able to give thanks to God at all times and for everything in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Led by Marjorie, Amy and all the other great voices in this congregation, we sing together as we gather for this sacred meal, lifting our voices in praise and a melody seeking those deeper harmonies in our lives and for the world. This past Wednesday evening at our session of "Being With Creation," Beth Mueller reminded us of the proverb (often attributed to St. Augustine\*), that, "The one who sings prays twice." That's what we are doing, lifting our voices in praise, giving God thanks for this time we share together, for the food and fellowship which nourishes us and for the blessings we are given so graciously. So yes, there's more, there's so much more as we gather around the Lord's table with a song on our lips. But as we say in the prayers, we ask God to deliver us from the presumption of coming to the table for solace only and not for strength, for pardon only and not for renewal; we come to be fed in order to find the peace in our lives we seek and need, but also to share that peace with our neighbors and all God's creation. That's why every week we gather together for a sacred meal and we sing together to pray twice in our fellowship. But this morning, today as we gather here on Quarry Hill, something more special takes place: we have a picnic time together as well! Thanks be to God for granting us this time of relaxation and fellowship and thatnks be to Christ for walking with us in the way of love. Amen.

\*Although Augustine did not write this, the sentiment certainly is implied in his thought.