

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 15, 2021

"Word Out" transcript



Prelude

Pastorale (excerpts)
Joel Martinson (b. 1960)

Welcome

P: Welcome, this Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, to Queen Anne Lutheran Church. Wherever you are listening, whatever challenges you might be facing, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung; a time when you can be still, and know God is God.

According to the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom prepares a feast, sets her table, and invites all to come and eat her bread and drink her wine. The first chapter of John's gospel owes much to the biblical tradition that imagined Wisdom as existing before anything was created and having a role in the work of creation. Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), today invites us to eat his flesh and drink his blood. John's gospel includes no account of the institution of the Lord's supper, but here we can't help hearing Jesus' words as an invitation to the meal of bread and wine we will soon share.

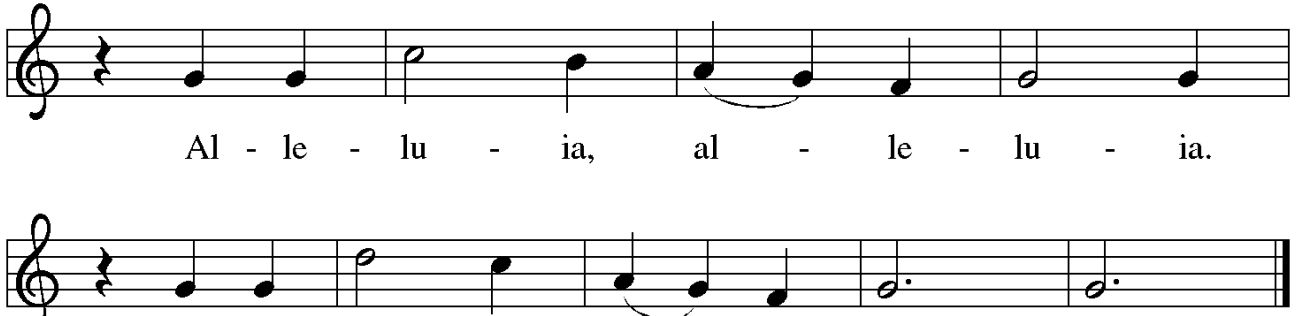
Greeting


P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

G: **And also with you.**

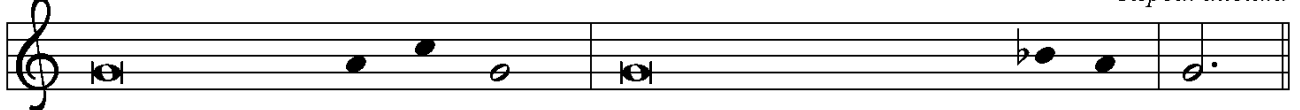
Gospel Acclamation

John 6:56

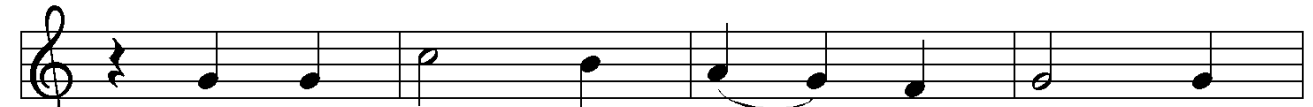
G: 
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia



P: Those who eat my flesh
and drink my blood abide in me, and I abide in them.

G: 
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.


Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Scripture Reading:

John 6:51-58

A: The Holy Gospel according to John, the sixth chapter.

A: [Jesus said,] ⁵¹“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.”

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I

in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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.”

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

My Conversation with Martin Luther
Pastor Dan Peterson

I have a problem with time. I can't calculate it properly. My friends know this. Ask me to meet for a cup of coffee, they will tell you, and they can almost guarantee that I will be five to ten minutes late. The same is true, as a few of you know, when it comes to church activities. I make every effort to be punctual, but even now I still fail – at least on occasion.

My inability to anticipate the length of time it takes me to do something became especially apparent last weekend when I presided at the wedding of Megan, one of our newest members of the congregation, and her fiancé-turned-husband Tom. We agreed that I would arrive an hour early to the ceremony, which was set to occur in West Seattle at 4 pm. Heavy traffic as well as my neglect of the clock, however, delayed my arrival: I got there at 3:50 pm, ten minutes before the wedding was to begin and 50 minutes after we had planned! It was embarrassing.

Fortunately, Megan and Tom were gracious. The wedding started soon thereafter, and everything went according to plan. Imagine what would have happened, though, if I had not agreed to arrive an hour early. Megan and Tom would have probably been less forgiving. I know I would have!

I share the difficulty I have in calculating time because it led, earlier this summer, to what is easily the strangest encounter of my life. It happened at Parsons Gardens, a beautiful little park tucked away on the southwest corner of Upper Queen Anne. Some of you know the place. None of you, however, know what I saw, or rather, who I saw. That is because I have not told anyone – until now.

Here I Sit

Take a trip to Parsons Gardens and you will find one of the most beautiful enclaves in the entire city. Tall trees surround the park's lush green interior, each standing like a wooden soldier at perfect attention, guarding treasures therein. A circular path runs along the inside perimeter, around which rest a couple of park benches. These benches are popular on warm, sunny days. When dusk arrives, however, things change. The encroaching darkness transforms the contents of the park into shadows. People leave, and the voices which gave witness to their presence depart with them.

On occasion I am one of the people occupying those benches late in the afternoon. I like to watch the sunset across the street from Parson's Gardens, and if I arrive early, I can stop at the park and walk its circle like a labyrinth.

But arriving early, as you (now) know, has never been my forte. Sometimes I miss the sunset, in which case I peek into the Gardens upon my late arrival to see if its benches are unoccupied. If they are, and if there is still some light out, I steal inside and sit. I like the quiet, and if I am feeling especially daring, I might even walk the path.

One night during the last week of June, after I had walked to the lookout and predictably missed the sunset, I felt particularly drawn to the park. I walked across the mostly-vacant street and peered through its narrow entrance to see if anyone else was present. Nobody was there. Enough light remained for me to see, so I entered the park, intending to follow its circular path. As I approached it, I could feel the grass beneath my feet cushion each of my steps. No sooner had I begun my journey when I noticed out of nowhere a figure sitting on the bench opposite the one I was passing. Even in the twilight I could make out his features: stout, probably between five and six feet tall, wearing a cap like I used to see at graduation ceremonies when I was a professor. I decided, albeit with a little hesitancy, to proceed and at least complete my lap.

As I approached, I noticed another feature. The man appeared to be wearing a robe which struck me obviously as odd, but then again, who was doing laps of

contemplation in a city park at dusk? I didn't have much room to judge! Several more steps and I passed the figure whose face the hat concealed.

Then I heard it.

"Pastor Dan," I heard from the person on the bench behind me. My heart froze. Who was this man, how did he know I was here, and why would anyone seek me out this way? "Pastor Dan," he said again firmly, causing me to stop in my tracks and turn around to see him. "Pastor Dan," he repeated as I found myself now walking toward him, stopping about six feet from where he sat. "Don't you recognize me?" he said, now looking up.

"Al? Al Shabino?" I asked.

"Heavens no!" he replied. "I'm Martin Luther."

A Portrait of the Artist

I was speechless, not simply due to his claim but because of what I saw. This man possessed an uncanny resemblance to Luther, at least according to the portraits I had seen, one of which hangs in my office. But how on earth could Luther, long deceased, be visiting me – and why?

"I suspect you want an explanation for why I'm here," Luther said in a pleasant but higher voice than I would have expected for a large man (Lull, *My Conversations with Martin Luther*, p. 12). Something else was different too: the English he spoke lacked a German accent. Instead, it contained a slightly British quality, which added to its dignity and authority (ibid.).

"Yes," I stammered finally, still overcome by the similarities he shared with the historical Luther, yet not quite ready to admit the two were one and the same.

"I am here to offer you an explanation," he said

You are here to offer *me* an explanation? I thought to myself. What kind of explanation? Was he going to tell me about the afterlife? I certainly had a lot of questions about that. Or was he going to give me some insight on how to face the massive problems before us today, problems he could have never

anticipated like climate change, cyber-attacks, or the threat of nuclear proliferation?

“Pastor Dan,” he said to me calmly, noticing that I was beginning to accept the truth of what I saw. “You are living in a truly scary chapter of your lifetime, and there is no guarantee that things will not get worse.”

I sighed.

“I am not here to bring you bad news,” he continued, consolingly. “But a theologian of the cross must call a thing what it is.”

I nodded, recalling the famous line from Luther’s “Heidelberg Disputation” of 1518.

“Times are difficult in your world,” he said. “I know that. Hundreds of thousands of people have died in your country of a – what do you call it – virus? We experienced the plague in Wittenberg three times when I lived there, and we had the equivalent of your vaccine-deniers as well. These were people who ‘put God to the test,’ as I wrote in 1527, by insisting God would protect them no matter what foolhardy things they did. Some days all I could do was shake my head, knowing that they were not only jeopardizing their own lives; they were also jeopardizing the lives of their neighbors.”

“I preached on that,” I said, surprised I could even muster a few words given the person with whom I was possibly speaking. “My congregation and I feel strongly that our first priority as Christians should be the health and well-being of our neighbors.”

“I know,” Luther replied. “You made that clear in the sermon you preached at the beginning of the pandemic. That’s why I am here. This time I have something I want you to preach, something that concerns not only the physical well-being of your neighbors – which should obviously remain a priority – but the spiritual well-being of your parishioners, too.”

What, I wondered, could it be?

The Assignment

Night had now fallen, forcing me to rely almost entirely on his word alone.

“The leadership of your congregation is about to affirm that you will reconvene for worship in August. This will be the first time that many in your flock have received Holy Communion in well over a year. Do they know what they are receiving?”

“The bread of life,” I replied, anticipating the readings that would come from the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel where Jesus uses the phrase in reference to himself.

“Yes,” Luther remarked, “but what does this mean? Does your congregation understand the distinction Jesus makes between people who eat to sustain their physical bodies versus ‘the bread of life they must eat to sustain their spirits and gain eternal life’” (Reinhartz, *New Testament Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, p. 281)?

“I think so,” I replied. “I have repeatedly spoken about the meaning of ‘eternal life’ as Jesus uses it in John, how it refers primarily to a quality of life on this side of the grave where the anxiety over death has been faced and, in some moments, conquered.”

“Fine,” Luther said, “but you are missing my point. Do you think most people who call themselves ‘Lutheran,’ a name I never liked but now accept, truly grasp how Christ becomes theirs in and through the bread and the wine?”

“Is that why you came to me?” I asked a bit flippantly. I mean, of all the reasons for Luther to appear, why would reviewing the meaning of Holy Communion be among them?

Luther’s expression suddenly changed. In the light that remained I could see it. He was angry.

Appealing to Paul

“Have you forgotten the words of Paul?” Luther demanded, his voice rising above mine. “Whoever . . . eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the Lord’s body, eat and drink judgment against themselves” (1 Cor 11:27-29).

I was silent for a moment, but then it came to me: the judgment about which Paul speaks is not only on those who receive communion in an “unworthy manner.” It is also on those who fail to teach their congregations the worthy way to receive it. That’s why Luther came to me! I had yet to preach a sermon on how to receive the sacrament worthily. I may have talked about it in forums, but I said nothing about it from the pulpit.

Luther waited until my “a-ha” moment passed. “Remember your own experience in seminary,” he finally said, “how you, a lifelong Lutheran, still had no understanding of what it meant for you to receive Christ in and through the bread and wine?”

“Yes,” I replied. “I knew that Christ was somehow present according to His Word, and I had come to believe He was likewise present among the people who gathered in His name, but I had trouble differentiating your view from the Catholic view of your time, the one that taught how, when the priest repeats the words of Christ at the Last Supper, the invisible essence of the bread and wine change into his body and blood, even though their outer appearance remains the same.”

“Correct,” Luther said, “that was their teaching, and looking back, while I still disagree that the bread and wine become Christ’s body and blood, I should have appreciated more the emphasis they placed on Christ being truly present. Communion, after all, is so much more than merely a memorial of the sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross.”

I agreed.

“Okay,” Luther said, “so in what way *is* Christ present in the bread and the wine? Now you have some explaining to do.”

The Meaning of the Sacrament

I started slowly. “When Christ walked among us,” I said, “his presence was confined to a human body. His body, however, was transformed after he died. He became the prototype of God’s new creation, possessing what Paul calls a “spiritual” or “glorified” body, a new “body” without spatial limitation (1 Cor 15:44). Now his presence, his body, fills all things (Eph 4:10).

“A little technical,” Luther interjected, “but continue.”

“If we assume that Christ in his risen ‘body’ now exists everywhere, that his presence is universal, then when we hear about eating or consuming his flesh and blood, as we do in passages like John 6:51-58, we must remember that we are talking about his spiritual body, not the physical body he once possessed. If we fail to make this distinction and talk about consuming his human body before he died, then critics rightly reject this teaching as nonsense. The body we consume is his spiritual one, his resurrected one, the one without spatial limitation, the one that fills all things. Otherwise, we sound like a bunch of cannibals.”

“Exactly,” Luther replied. “Christ’s ‘real presence’ can be found in everything from the tiniest grain of sand to the largest body of water. God is everywhere, and so is Christ, who exists at His right hand.”

“But there is a problem,” I interjected. “Just because Christ is present in all things doesn’t mean we can find him in all things. I can grope for Christ under a rock, as you once said, but he is not there for me in a consoling or spiritual way! When I receive communion, on the other hand, I experience Christ’s presence differently. Thanks to His Word, his promise—‘this is my body given for you’—I receive him differently than I would ordinarily through wine and bread. I am consoled. I am forgiven. I am reassured. I am accepted.”

“I knew you’d get in a reference to Paul Tillich and his sermon, ‘You Are Accepted,’” Luther told me. “But I like the phrase. It captures something of the way we should all approach Holy Communion, as a place where Christ, though in all things, becomes present to us in a special way.

“When you talk about how we should approach communion,” I asked, “do you mean how to receive it worthily?”

“Yes,” Luther said. “If you cannot acknowledge your own brokenness, if you are too proud to think you don’t need forgiveness, you have no place at the Lord’s table. The sacrament means something only to those who know deep within their bones that they have not loved God with their whole heart, and that they have not loved their neighbors as themselves.”

“But the point,” I added, “is not to make people feel even worse. It’s not to say you are a horrible person. It’s to say, despite your brokenness, God feeds you with forgiveness! Be free of your burden and your guilt and go with God’s blessing to love and forgive others as God has forgiven you.”

“Indeed,” Luther observed, “there was something in my time that felt empowering when it came to receiving the eucharist, something that gave me the courage to go out again and face the world. Your people need that, Pastor Dan. You need that.”

“Wow,” I said. “So, in the end, it’s not about the transformation of the bread and the wine into Christ’s body and blood; it’s about our transformation as people who are ‘called to freedom’ (Gal 5:1) now that we have been forgiven.”

“Yes!” Luther exclaimed.

“And there is more,” I added. “Christ is always in bread and wine, but when we recognize His presence in the bread and the wine for us, our consciousness changes. We receive him in a special way. The transformation resides in us, in our perspective – not in the elements we receive.”

“Yes!” Luther exclaimed again. “Now you know why I appeared to you. Along with all the other clergy who bear my name, you have a responsibility to proclaim this teaching so that those who are fed by the bread find the acceptance, the reassurance, and the power they need to venture back out into the world as people for others, as a force for the common good. Some of your people know this already, but even they need to be reminded.”

“I understand,” I said, looking out into the darkness, “but how will I ever turn what we discussed into a sermon?” My words hung in the silence. “Maybe you already have,” a voice within me said. “Maybe you already have.”

Amen.

Are you curious about today’s story? Read the one that inspired it: [My Conversations with Martin Luther](#) by Timothy Lull.

Hymn of the Day
(stanzas 1, 2 & 5)

I Am the Bread of Life
ELW 485

Leader or All

1 "I am the Bread of life. You who
2 "The bread that . . . I will give is my
3 "Un - less . . . you . . . eat of the
4 "I am the res - ur - rec - tion,
5 Yes, Lord, I be - lieve that . . .

come to me shall not hun - ger, and who be -
flesh for the life of the world, and if you
flesh of the Son of Man and . . .
I am the life. . . . If you be -
you are the Christ, the . . .

lieve in me shall not thirst. No one can come to
eat of this bread, and you shall . . live for -
drink of his blood, and drink of his
lieve in . . . me, e - ven . . though you
Son of . . . God, who have . . .

me un - less the Fa - ther beck - ons."
ev - er, you shall live for - ev - er."
blood, you shall not have life with - in you."
die, you shall live for - ev - er."
come in - to the world. . . .

Refrain
All



“And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up on the last day.”

Prayers of the Church

A: Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

A: God of wisdom, enlighten your church. Guide theologians, biblical scholars, authors, and seminary professors as they seek greater knowledge and invite others into deeper understanding. Teach us to ask faithful questions and open our minds to new ideas. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of creation, mend the earth. Cool warming oceans and preserve melting ice caps. Increase our awareness of changing climate patterns and reveal new approaches to the ecological challenges we face. Shield those in the path of hurricanes or tropical storms. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of all nations, direct our leaders. Grant them courage to lay aside political grudges and renew their determination to address difficult conflicts. Guide them in the work of reconciliation. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of compassion, tend to the wounded. Rescue those tormented by mental illness or mired in addiction. Ease the anxiety of those struggling with dementia. Come quickly to help all who are grieving and all those who suffer. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of beauty, inspire artists. Bless those whose visual and musical gifts enliven this assembly. Bless the creative work of poets, hymnwriters, composers, painters, sculptors, and others that enrich our worship and daily life. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: For whom or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

A: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: God of resurrection, bring us to new life. Give us the living bread from heaven through which we abide in your love, and on the last day raise us with all the saints to eternal life. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

G: **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

G: **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever.**

Amen.

Announcements

P: We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

G: **Amen.**

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

G: **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude

Finale Jubilante
Healey Willan (1880–1968)

About today's music

Today's prelude and postlude illustrate how peaceful and how grand the organ can sound. Both pieces were written by modern or contemporary composers. Joel Martinson (b. 1960) was born in Minneapolis, raised in Oregon, and currently serves The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration in Dallas, Texas (he's also the composer of the music for the Gospel Acclamation and ELW Setting Nine). Martinson's *Pastorale* is part of a larger cycle of several pieces that he eventually entitled as *Music for a Sunday Morning*. The Anglo-Canadian Healey Willan (1880–1968) is best known for his church music among some 800 works that span opera to piano music. His "Finale Jubilante" is especially... *jubilant!*

—Cantor Kyle



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Parish Administrator	Barbara Bash
Sexton	John Bryant

✘ *In Worship Today* ✘

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Lector and Intercessor	Jacqui Darroch

*This service of worship can also be listened to online on our website
or on the Queen Anne Lutheran podcast.*

Next Sunday, August 22, 2021 at 10 AM, Queen Anne Lutheran will begin worshiping in person each Sunday morning, with precautions in place to prevent Covid19 transmission.

Those attending are asked to wear a mask and will be physically distanced.

Going forward, our live Sunday worship will be audio-recorded. Those recordings will be posted online by Sunday evening for those who wish to listen at home.

(More details to come – this process may begin in a few weeks.)

Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on “WORD OUT” to find resources for worship at home, as well as resources to use with children. Visit our YouTube channel for other worship services, educational forums, music and messages for children, and other music.