



Copyright © 2018 by H. N. Wendt
Crossways International
Minneapolis, MN 55435 USA
1-800-257-7308
www.crossways.org

The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

August 5, 12, 19, 26, and September 2
by the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International

August 5, The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:24–35

In **6:16**, we read of the disciples sailing from the east coast of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Capernaum on the west coast.

The crowds (many of whom had likely been among the 5,000) notice that when the disciples get into their boat to sail back to the west coast, Jesus is not with them (6:22). Furthermore, groups of people from Tiberias sail across the sea to the region where the feeding miracle took place (6:23).

6:24: When they arrive in the east bank region, they observe that Jesus and His disciples are no longer there—so they get back into their boats and sail west to Capernaum, looking for Jesus.

V. 25: When the travelers meet Jesus on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, they ask Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” (The conversation that follows resembles that in ch. 4, which describes Jesus’ conversation with a woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria.) In the following play on words, Jesus tells them that He came from heaven!

Vv. 26–27: Jesus tells the people that the reason they are looking for Him is because they ate their fill of the loaves that He shared on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He urges them not to focus on food that enters the stomach, but on the food “that endures for eternal life.” Jesus can and does give people that food! In sharing these insights with His hearers, Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of Man”—a term that surfaces in Daniel 7:13 and denotes “the true people of God” (the Jewish people!) to whom God will give dominion over the nations for ever and forever. However, God has set His seal on Jesus, the true Son of Man, the true Lord of the nations, the true Lord of time and eternity.

Vv. 28–29: When the people ask what *they must do* to perform the works of God, Jesus tells them that the issue is not what they *do*; it is what they *believe*. And they are to believe in the One whom God has sent. As always, the hopes and dreams of the people are on the material level; they see the miraculous nature of the “sign” of Jesus’ actions, but do not understand its true meaning. Jesus tries to raise their sights above their materialistic outlook, but is met with their persistent inability to understand.

Vv. 30–31: The people now introduce the Passover theme of the manna that God provided for His people during the time of the wilderness wanderings. In Jesus' day, the rabbinic expectation was that when the Messiah eventually appeared, the manna would fall from the heavens once again. Jesus is that manna.

Vv. 32–35: Jesus tells His hearers that the True Bread is not the bread that their forefathers ate during the wilderness wanderings. It is Jesus' Father who gives His people the True Bread from heaven, and that True Bread is Jesus and His Word. Only that True Bread can and does give life to the world. When the people ask Jesus to give them this bread *always*, Jesus tells them that He is that bread. Whoever comes to Jesus, the true Bread of Life, will never be hungry and will never be thirsty.

The implications of Jesus words are profound to the extreme, and are sorely needed in our challenged and confused world.

August 12, The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:35, 41–51

Although there is overlap in the pericopes for August 12, 19, and 26, the major themes that surface within these passages take time to unravel. Prior to probing the present pericope, note the comments made in relation to the closing section of the pericope for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, John 6:24–35 (previous session).

Vv. 30–31: The people now introduce the Passover theme of the manna that God provided for His people during the time of the wilderness wanderings. In Jesus' day, the rabbinic expectation was that when the Messiah eventually appeared, the manna would fall from the heavens once again.

Vv. 32–35: Jesus tells His hearers that the “true bread” is not the bread that their forefathers ate during the wilderness wanderings. It is Jesus' Father who gives His people the True Bread from heaven, and that True Bread is Jesus and His Word. Only that True Bread can and does give life to the world. When the people ask Jesus to give them this bread *always*, Jesus tells them that *He is that bread*. Whoever comes to Jesus, the true Bread of Life, will never be hungry and will never be thirsty.

Up to v. 50, “bread of life” is a figure for God's revelation in Jesus. In vv. 51–58, the eucharistic theme plays a role.

V. 35: In asking for a sign, the crowds refer to the fact that God provided their forefathers with manna during their time in the wilderness (6:30–31; see also Exodus 16:4–35). Although the manna ceased to fall after the Israelites entered the land (Joshua 5:10–12), they believed that it would fall again when the Messianic Age broke in:

And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time (2 Baruch 29:8).

Some thought that although the manna was hidden by Jeremiah (2 Maccabees 2:4–8), it would reappear miraculously at Passover in the last days.

However, Jesus declares that He is the True Bread of Life come down from heaven and that He gives and sustains true life throughout time and eternity.

V. 41: Many of Jesus' hearers cannot accept this claim. They begin to complain and murmur as their forefathers did during the wilderness wanderings; see also 6:60 and Exodus 16:2, 7–8. Some leave Him (6:66). Although the circle of Jesus' adherents diminishes, the disciples remain with Him (6:67–69).

V. 42: The claim of Jesus' opponents that they know His origins (as a descendant of Joseph and Mary) is highly ironical. They do not see Him as One come down from heaven.

Vv. 43–46: Jesus reminds His opponents of the prophecies that promised divine teaching such as His. However, they really do not know where He is from because they have not seen His Father.

Some comments by N.T. Wright in relation to v. 44:

C.S. Lewis was once interviewed by an American Christian journalist who was writing about well-known characters who had converted to Christianity during adult life. The theme was "decision." He wanted to get Lewis to say how he had made "his decision." Unfortunately for the journalist's project, Lewis refused to put it in those terms. He hadn't "made a decision," he said. God had closed in on him and he couldn't escape (although at the time he had badly wanted to). The closest he could get to using the language the reporter was interested in was to say, "I was decided upon." In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes it in a more evocative phrase, "God's compulsion is our liberation."

Vv. 47–48: Eternal life is not merely something that we shall "get" one day in the distant future. It is something that we possess, enjoy, and live now. Jesus' brothers and sisters have already been given the "divine passport" that declares them to be citizens of heaven. As such, they are to seek to live *now* as they shall *then*.

Jesus promises those who come to Him in faith that He will raise them up on the last day (vv. 39–40, 44)—the sure hope that is on offer throughout John's Gospel. However, "eternal life" is also the manner of life that God's people are to pursue in this present world. They are to seek to share the inner life of Jesus that is on offer at once to anyone who believes. "Eternal" denotes a life that is available in the here and now, as well as after death. It is the life of the age to come—the new life that God has always planned to give to His world. This life will be shared by all who taste of the Living Bread.

Vv. 49–50: Jesus' opponents are so proud of their ancestors and of the manna they ate during the exodus-wilderness events. However, that manna did not stop their fathers from dying, and it did not keep them faithful to God.

V. 51: The life-giving bread, and indeed *living bread*, is Jesus' own flesh. The reference is to *feeding in faith* on all who Jesus was and is, and all that He achieved for the salvation for humanity.

August 19, The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:51–58

V. 51: See the comments on the previous pericope.

V. 52: Jesus' Jewish hearers argue among themselves concerning how Jesus can possibly give them His flesh to eat.

Vv. 53–54: For Paul, the Lord's Supper proclaims the death of our Lord until He reappears at the end of time. In John, the emphasis is that the Word has become flesh and has offered up His flesh and blood as a source of life—a proclamation of Jesus' incarnation as a saving event. Those who cut themselves off from (faith in) Jesus' saving "flesh and blood" cut themselves off from true life in this present world and from eternal life in the world to come.

Vv. 55–57: Only Jesus offers true "food" and "drink" through His saving ministry. Only those who "eat" and "drink" what Jesus offers experience an intimate, eternal relationship with Him. Only they *live* in the full and eternal sense of the word.

V. 58: Those who ate the material manna that came down from the skies during the wilderness wanderings died. Those who eat the spiritual bread that Jesus offers freely will live forever. Obviously, the key words that Jesus uses in this section of John are to be understood spiritually, not literally. The central message throughout is our utter and complete dependence on Jesus the Messiah. Our communion with Him must be so close that the very life of Jesus becomes our own life.

In one of his sermons, John Baillie affirmed the absolute priority of this fellowship with Jesus, this attention to His saving Word and to the receiving of His life. He told the story of a man on the northwest frontier of India leading a fine horse with elaborate harness. There came the day when a band of robbers seized the horse, but let the man go. There came another day when a group of thieves robbed him of a gold chain concealed in his turban. Eventually, the man reached his destination wearing only a ragged loincloth. But to his master's son he presented the real gift he had been assigned to convey: a great pearl that he had hidden in his armpit. "So let us, if need be," said John Baillie, "surrender all other things, but hold to the one thing needful."

Perhaps better: to the One *Person* needful!

Those who wish to relate John's message concerning the implications for life of a faith-relationship with Jesus might make use of the following:

When Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) celebrated the Eucharist, he pointed first to the sacred elements on the altar and said, "Behold, the body of Christ."

He then pointed to the worshipers present and said, "And you are the body of Christ."

Next, he invited the worshipers, "Come, eat what you are."

And finally he exhorted them, "Go forth to become what you eat."

August 26, The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:56–69

Again, there is overlap between this pericope and the previous one.

Vv. 56–58: See the comments on the previous pericope.

V. 59: John offers information about the location in which Jesus shared the message outlined in the pericopes being surveyed: “the synagogue at Capernaum.” Devote some time to pondering Mark’s comments about what took place in that same synagogue early in Jesus’ ministry (Mark 1:21–28).

Vv. 60–61: Jesus’ teaching is greeted with unbelief—as too difficult to accept.

Vv. 62–63: Jesus responds by referring to His glorification (His eventual ascent into the presence of His Father by way of the cross) as the event that will give credence to His teaching. Jesus’ ascension will indicate that He has been speaking of spiritual realities and not of the literal eating of His physical flesh.

The desire of those who desert Jesus is to acquire “physical bread”—material things. As with Nicodemus, such fleshly goals are opposed to spiritual goals (John 3:6). Physical bread, material things, will not give life. However, Jesus’ teaching confers the Holy Spirit who in turn bestows true life. Spirit and life are “partner terms.”

Vv. 64–65: Jesus declares that He has known from the outset who would believe and who would not, and which of the disciples would betray Him. Little wonder then, that those who come to faith in Jesus have only His Father to thank for that great and gracious gift. Human boasting—never! On the other hand, those who do not come to faith in Jesus have only themselves to blame.

Vv. 66–69: After many of Jesus’ hearers desert Him, Jesus asks the Twelve which of them plans to desert Him also. Peter responds with a powerful confession of faith and trust. Jesus is the Holy One of God, and He alone has the words of eternal life. Therefore, if any of the disciples plan to desert Jesus, to whom can they go?

Leslie Weatherhead suggests that Peter and the other loyal disciples “put Christ’s words away in their minds as one might put into a drawer a letter that one could not understand—to take it out when an interpreter turned up who would reveal its meaning.” So it must be with our reading and study of the Bible. We must not be impatient with those parts that we cannot understand, nor on the other hand should we become obsessed with merely the mysterious and symbolic. As Morgan Derham once said: “We must let what is clear and plain be the key to what is obscure and difficult.”

The implications of Jesus’ message are more profound. Those who wish to proclaim and teach it must continue to probe and ponder it throughout life. Several years ago, we were visited by a businessman who had served as a Baptist pastor for about ten years. However, the day came when he resigned from the clergy—and he shared with us why he had done so: “I was troubled by the fact that I myself was not taking seriously the message I was proclaiming to others.”

The message that pastors, teachers, lay leaders, and parents are to proclaim, share, and show is profound. We are not merely to define it; we are to demonstrate it. The following summary points are worth pondering:

- We live on a planet and in a body we did not make and do not own.
- We cannot “give”; we can merely manage Another’s property.
- Jesus was not merely a messenger from God; He was, is, and always will be God.
- We can do nothing to “get forgiveness.” We can merely trust in the forgiveness that God freely offers—and God Himself creates within us the faith that trusts in that forgiveness.
- We can do nothing to reconcile God to us. The Bible never refers to God needing to be reconciled to us; it speaks only of God seeking to reconcile fallen humanity to Himself.
- Jesus calls us to walk out-of-step with all worldly “live for self” systems, and calls us to devote life to following Him in non-stop caring and compassionate servanthood.
- Jesus took the reality of the “satanic realm” seriously throughout His ministry. We are to do the same.
- There are really only two denominations in the world: Jesus’ denomination and Satan’s denomination.

Those who have access to CI’s study course *In Heaven’s Name, Why on Earth?* may want to refer to the “Ten Deadly Delusions” in the latter part of that study manual and to the detailed comments made about each one. Sad to say, humanity is plagued by hundreds of spiritual delusions—not merely ten. Some of these delusions are built into some of the national songs that people sing around Planet Earth. And although some look forward to the recovery of the world’s economy and the return of the “good old days,” on what do nations base their economy, and how does Jesus define “good days”? It is significant that He never linked being blessed to what people possess and enjoy. He linked it only to reflecting His servant lifestyle; see again Matthew 25:31–46.

September 2, The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

In Mark 7:1–23, Jesus attacks the narrow, legalistic, and extreme practices of the Pharisees in relation to purification (vv. 2–5), external worship (vv. 6–7), and observance of commandments. In doing this, Jesus defines the true moral intent of the divine law (vv. 8–13). However, He does more than merely contrast His Father’s true law with the manner in which the Pharisees interpret it. In vv. 14–15, He sets aside the law itself in respect to clean and unclean food, and in doing so, opens the way for unity between *Jew* and *Gentile* in the kingdom of God. *And He Himself ministers in Gentile territory* (Mark 5:1–20; 7:24–30, 31–37; 8:1–10).

V. 1: Some unfriendly Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem gather around Jesus to spy on Him.

Vv. 2–4: Some scholars point out that there are no references in the Jewish Talmuds (written AD 250–450) to the observance of the severe ritual requirements referred to in these verses. Some suggest that the rituals referred to were practiced in the Diaspora—by Jews living beyond the borders of the Holy Land.

However, there is every reason to believe that Mark was very familiar with the rabbinic practices and oral traditions of Jesus’ day. He wrote only a few decades after Jesus completed His ministry—at a time when many who had been eyewitnesses and hearers of what Jesus did and said were still alive. Furthermore, he explains patiently and in detail (as if to non-Jews) what the practices of “the Jews” or

“the Judeans” were. In the rabbinic mind, a trip to a public place could certainly bring defilement through proximity, and kitchen utensils did have to be immersed after use.

V. 5: When some Pharisees confront Jesus about the fact that His disciples do not practice ritual washing prior to eating, Jesus responds that, although the Pharisees pay much attention to *external* ritual purity, they pay little or no attention to *inner* spiritual purity.

Jesus’ challenge to the authority of oral law is in question when these scribal and Pharisaic heirs of “the ancients” (like-minded men of the previous two centuries) attack Him through His disciples. The Greek word translated as “live” in this verse means literally “walk”; it has links to the Hebrew verb *halak*, “to conduct one’s life.”

V. 6: This verse contains Jesus’ first use of the term *hypocrite* in Mark’s Gospel. In this verse, Mark quotes the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Jewish scriptures, which offers a slightly different meaning from the Hebrew. However, Jesus’ meaning remains clear, whichever translation is used.

Vv. 7–8: It is dishonorable to substitute human precepts for divine teaching. Those who claim to be well informed concerning God’s will set aside great religious matters and focus instead on minor issues that have to do with such things as crockery!

Vv. 14–15: Jesus points out that what enters a person is of no great consequence; it enters the stomach and passes through the body. What matters is what comes out of the heart via the mouth.

Vv. 21–23: Jesus then lists the thoughts and actions that flow from the heart and mouth and truly defile. “Evil intentions” have to do with wicked designs and desires. Jesus lists 12 of them, which read like a catechetical list that resembles those found in Paul’s writings (e.g., Galatians 5:19–21).

Jesus’ overall message in this section of Mark is that the Pharisees and scribes had made the outward observance of the Law all important, with the result that ceremonial uncleanness had replaced purity of heart, and religious rituals had taken priority over right relationships. Because they focused on appearances rather than attitudes, pretense was never far away. Their lip service to God was a cover for hearts that dishonored Him. Still today (and sad to say), we, like the scribes and Pharisees of old, often blame *things* for our failings—for our spiritual and moral uncleanness. However, the heart of the issue usually has to do with our inner life. It is there that Jesus wants to rule!

We might say that the scribes and Pharisees established “legal checkpoints” in relation to entry into Jewish synagogues and communities. And do not some churches still today operate checkpoints in relation to whom they accept into the fellowship? “You are not welcome here! You have the wrong skin color! You belong to the wrong political party! You had a child out of wedlock!” However, Jesus touched lepers and those with physical blemishes—those affected with things that religious leaders said excluded them from membership in God’s people (Mark 1:40–45). For example, He permitted a Jewish woman who had been experiencing non-stop menstrual bleeding for 12 years (and was therefore seen as an outcast in both her family circle and village community) to touch Him—and addressed her as *daughter* (Mark 5:25–34). He showed mercy to a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28) and fed 4,000 Gentile men with bread and fish (Mark 8:1–10).

No—there should never be a *checkpoint* at a church entrance, only a *welcome point*. And while some of

CI's materials suggest placing a "Servants' Entrance" sign above the door leading into a worship center, perhaps it would be more appropriate to word that sign, "Forgiven Servants' Entrance." No! We do not invite people to church so that they can "get" forgiveness. Rather, we invite them into our Christian family so that they might learn about the forgiveness that God has been offering to them throughout life! However, God's goal has to do with more than offering information for the head; it has to do with achieving a radical transformation of the totality of life. His invitation is, "Believe in My forgiving, saving, servant Son—and follow Him full-time!"