

Date Preached	23-May-2021	Date Initiated	11-May-2021
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	P'cost, Yr B

**8:30** " All of them look to you to give them their food in due season "  
**10:30** " You open wide your hand, with good, | To fill all things that live "



Have you ever noticed that in Scripture, some of the moments of God's greatest grace and tenderest love emerge in the earthiest of circumstances? As we conclude the season of Easter today, we need merely to look back upon the Resurrection itself: the glory of Christ Risen—and all this promises for humanity; but in the gospels, we first learn of His rising *not* from an angel hovering or a dove descending from Heaven, but in a dank, deserted garden, as we peer into a tomb and see the soiled burial cloths in a heap on the dirt floor. Or think about the Last Supper, when Jesus lovingly institutes the sacrament of Holy Communion, but only after He has gone around the room and washed each of the disciples' muddy, callused feet with His own hands. And then there are the divine miracles we see Jesus perform that involve blood and seizures, using mud and saliva as His cures ... and even placing His fingers in someone's ears.\*

The story of Pentecost, the feast we celebrate today, is cut from the same interwoven cloth. On the one hand, we witness the culmination of the salvation narrative that begins with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Having died, risen again and ascended into Heaven, He now sends the Holy Spirit into this world to "guide [us] into all truth ... to declare to [us] the things that are to come." The Spirit is Jesus' final gift to us: an Advocate and a helper; a comforter and a counselor; a guide who "helps us in our weakness"; and a dear friend who intercedes for us when we don't know where to turn or how to pray.

On the other hand, see the earthy drama that attends the gift of God's permanent grace: the violent rush of wind ... some strange apparition, like fire, coming to rest atop each disciple's head ... and their suddenly starting to babble—using words they themselves don't understand, in languages they have never learned. Indeed, passersby on the streets of Jerusalem hear the cacophony and accuse them of being drunk at nine o'clock in the morning! ... The abiding presence of God in and for humanity juxtaposed with torrents of wind, the lapping of fire and a chaos of strange words in stranger languages: Pentecost has all the hallmarks of the *earthy grace* that fills Scripture from start to finish.

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Earthy grace: It is also an apt description of the Church's sacraments. The slopping of water and smearing of olive oil that initiates new believers into the Body of Christ in Baptism; and the touch of a bishop's hands that later confirms them ... and, still later, might ordain a one or two of them. The blessing and exchange of small hoops of metal in Marriage. The gentle crossing of a

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\* This phenomenon is not limited to the New Testament. Jacob (who will become Father Israel) swindles his brother and deceives his father; and he later encounters God in a wrestling match that injures him permanently. God plucks David, the future and vaunted king of Israel, from his father's smelly sheep folds. Jaël delivers Israel from the Canaanites by driving a spike through the head of Sisera, their Canaanite general. (And don't even ask me about Ehud and Eglon!)

forehead as Unction<sup>†</sup> is given to the sick or the dying. All of these sacraments are, we profess, "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ" (*BCP*, p 857), and all are embodied in simple, everyday materials and gestures: water, oil, metal; the touch of a hand or a finger. Most of the time, such common things barely register with us. But when their use is set apart and joined to our *faith*, they become, for us, the very presence and activity and love of Christ, again and again.

And perhaps the greatest juxtaposition of the common and the everyday with the holy and divine occurs in the Holy Eucharist. As valuable as we know them to be, when we strip away all the trappings—discard the exotic clothing that descends from the imperial court of Rome; cut through the elaborate prayers that have accreted over time; silence, for a moment, the centuries of music that enrich our worship—when we suspend all of that ... we are left, again, with *earthy grace*: a humble feast ... of Godly proportions. The Eucharist *begins* with a feast of words: Lines of ancient Scripture are read in halting, humble voices, and then a preacher struggles to make some human sense of the divine absurdity that is God's love and care for us. And the Eucharist *ends* with a feast of service: We are dismissed into the world, to feed its citizens the love, charity and mercy of Christ we carry with us.

And right there [ >> **altar**] ... right in between word and service ... we feast—literally—at the simplest and grandest banquet in all of creation. The fundamental foodstuff of the western world ... some ground-up grain, a slug of water and maybe a pinch of salt ... becomes, for us, the *Body* of Christ: the Body we can touch and smell and chew and swallow, as *our* bodies consume God's grace once again and re-connect with the peace and the strength and gentleness of Jesus. The most common beverage in the Ancient Near East ... a brew of grapes, sugar, yeast and water ... becomes, for us, the *Blood* of Christ: the Blood that fills our bodies with His presence and refreshes our parched souls. In a morsel of bread and a sip of wine—a mere taste of the earthiest elements of human existence—we experience the full infinitude and amplitude of God's grace. And having consumed earthy grace, we *become* earthy grace,<sup>‡</sup> so that we, in turn, may engrace a starved world so desperately in need of God's touch ... of Jesus' love.

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We have been away from this table a very long time indeed. God willing, those of us who are able to return now will not be absent from it again. And we wait, with longing and loving hearts, for the return of those who cannot yet be with us. During our 'great hiatus' we have, most surely, been fed, week in and week out: We have received Christ's full grace at every spiritual communion. But we are *earthy* creatures. Before we can read, we touch. Before we learn to talk, we taste. Our bodies learn God's love, physically and materially ... and thus, we *crave* when we can't hold or smell or taste that love.

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<sup>†</sup> Technically, *The Book of Common Prayer* calls this "Ministration to the Sick" / "Ministration at the Time of Death."

<sup>‡</sup> See, from Augustine:

V. Behold what you are.

R. May we become what we receive.

So, come to the table, my sisters and brothers. Come to eat the Bread and be flooded by God's presence. Come to chew the Body and have the love of Christ course through you. Come know, once again, the grace ... the *earthy* grace ... of Jesus.



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