

(choir singing) (organ music) (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (organ music) (choir singing)

- When we gather to praise God, we remember that we are the people of God who have preferred our own wills to the Divine will. Accepting the power God offers to us to become new persons in Christ. Let us confess our sin before God and one another. Let us pray. Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you and thought word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We pray you of your mercy. Forgive what we have been. Amend what we are, direct what we shall be, that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen. Hear the good news. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That is God's own proof of his love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Amen. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)

- Let us with one voice, affirm our faith. We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God, who has created and is creating. Who has come and the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new who works in us and others through the spirit. We trust God who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and it's fullness. To walk just (indistinct). To seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen. Our judge and our Hope. In live and death. And life beyond death. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

- Let us pray. Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the scriptures are read and the word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen. The word of God written in St. Paul's letters to the church at Philippi. "Rejoice in the Lord always again, I will say rejoice, that all persons know your forbearance, the Lord is at hand." "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." "Finally, brethren, whatever is true." "Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious." "If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me do." "And the God of peace will be with you." Here ends the epistle. Let us rise for the Gospel. The Holy Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. According to Saint Matthew: Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and let it out to tenants and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another and stoned another. Again he sent other servants

more than the first and they did the same to them. Afterward He sent his son to them saying, "They will respect my son." When the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir. Come let us kill him and have his inheritance." And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyards comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, "He will put those wretches to the miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their season." And Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures? The very stone, which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." This was the Lord's doing. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation, producing the fruits of it. The gospel of the Lord. (organ music) (choir singing)

- In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. (clears throat) If you want to catch a glimpse of the world, in which most humans live, the sub literary world, you can not afford to treat graffiti casually. Mixed in with advertising claims that love alone transcends Schlitz. You hit upon graffiti, which are poignant. Or graffiti with sharp edges. I saw one moving on a bumper last week. Adam was a rough draft. Some, some graffiti assume an ongoing discussion. And they are the ones which provoke the interest of a historian. For example, the barbs and the jousting's that are swapped by the religious and the not so religious "Honk, if you love Jesus." Has evoked a more skeptical, "Honk if you are Jesus." (congregation laughs)

- And this exchange has just about run its course. If my latest intelligence is trustworthy because a friend told me the other night that he had seen the latest entry. "Jeez, if you are hunkus" (congregation laughing)

- That graffiti skirmish over Jesus has a long, long history. Sometime back in the first centuries of the church's life, some anonymous person scratched a rough picture into the wall of the Pedagogium, on Rome's Palatine Hill. In that picture, a man has his hands raised in reverence to a crucified figure, a figure clearly human, except that the head is that of an ass. And below in Greek, it says, "Alexamenos worships his god." The graffito's scorn is directed at Alexamenos, and anyone else who locates the power of deity in a human. Or even worse in a human who is no hero, but a victim of the world's machinery. For the wall scribbler, it's a good jibe, a clean deft put down. Christ and Christians are self-evidently ridiculous. I cannot report how Alexamenos and his companions put together their retort to this hostile portrait of their faith. But that graffito itself and the need the need to carve it into the wall, yield more than one interpretation. The picture may represent an easy joke and nothing more. Christ is a laughable weakling savior who attracts to his worship silly asses. Nobody's like himself. And Christianity is a view of life. You can discount in a moment, you can write it off with a cartoon. Or, looked at in another way that graffito may give evidence of a more serious estimate of this strange cult of Jesus. The asses head of the Savior may reflect the Emperor Nero's reported practice of dressing Christians in animal skins before executing them on crosses or in fire. On that reading Christianity is a view of life which must be eliminated. Christians are fools for Christ, whose loyalty and worship cast a question mark, before every definition of the good life, which society is promoting. Christians are a challenge to the cultures estimate of what is wise, what is to be valued. "Silly asses" justifying temporary fantasies and mindless prejudices by the use of Jesus' name or fools to be contended with both worshipers and carriers of an alternate wisdom. A cruciform wisdom. Somehow when it comes down to this, Alexamenos is not the only one who needs to answer. And what seemed at first a curious antique graffito, will not stay safely and its historical chamber, but it comes to interrogate would be

loyalists like you and me, and the hard ambiguities are no longer just his, but ours. What can it mean for one who pledges allegiance to a vulnerable Savior, a powerless God to be a citizen supporter of a superpower? Or to marshal forces and organized power to contest oppressors, which we spy outside and inside the community of faith. When we arrive at convictions and prosecute them, will it be fair to regard us, as "silly asses" responding either with enthusiasm or suspicion to whatever new thing emerges from the horizon? Faddists and reactionaries who anoint their whims in the name of Jesus? Or if we read ourselves differently as conscientious fools moved my wisdom itself to be what we are. Are we liable to be too firmly committed, to be revised? Too flexible to stand firm? Too much into dying to live? Or too much into living to die? Does what we believe deserve ridicule or does it in fact, represent the death dealing and life promising question, which we were charged to carry to the culture and along the way to keep alive in ourselves? How do you and I look sketched out in our time as worshipers of the crucified one with a head of an ass? Merely ridiculous asses who have done neither serious living nor serious thinking, or fools whose existence puts in its sharpest form, what it might mean to lose your life and in the process to find it. Maybe now, just before I stop talking, I can spring on you today's text from the Apostle Paul. His claim that the peace of God passes all understanding. Why is that so? Because we are not up to it intellectually and spiritually? Because we cannot handle it? Or because it is so difficult to get down to it, get down to the heart of things in human terms? I believe that Paul's answer, sounds like this: The peace of God eludes us. Not because of it's awesome distance, but because of its proximity, because it is at hand. And the peace of God is about brokenness and weakness and the hope of having all that bound up once again. The peace of God is about a crucified God who by the standards of a culture in love with eternal growth and power is an ass. What is compelling about the communion we are about to celebrate is not that it is worldwide. That is that it is impressive in numbers and global extent. What is foolish and irresistible about this meal is the fact that even though you and I would have declined the original, dangerous invitation from its vulnerable host out of our fear and our indecision and our unreadiness to be loved in the foolish way that Christ loves nevertheless, we are welcomed to it to lose our lives and define them. Paul's words then belong to Alexamenos and all the rest of us who have been implicated in that wall drawing in Rome. Rejoice in the Lord, always rejoice, let all know your forbearance the Lord is at hand, have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- Let us pray. On this worldwide communion Sunday, let us pray that the world may live in peace and that the church may achieve unity, fulfilling its service here and everywhere. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- That all Ministers and Teachers and in the church, may be faithful servants of the Gospel, leading others into its way of life and strengthening their faith. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- That the leaders of this nation and the world may govern with justice and mercy. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- That all our work may be done for the common good, that it be done and safety. And that all may be spared from grinding toil, which destroys fullness of life. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- That those who work on frontiers of truth, and those who enrich our lives with beauty and joy may be free to follow their vocations. (crowd chattering indistinctly) That those who do suffer, disease or poverty or loneliness or grief may be healed and comforted. That those who are oppressed or persecuted, maybe strengthened and delivered. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- That those whom we have known and loved who have died in the faith, maybe a glorious memory to us and a source of renewed fellowship with all the saints. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Christ our Lord invites to His table all who love Him and who desire to live in peace with one another. May the peace of the Lord be with you always. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- As forgiven and reconcile people, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God. (organ music) (choir singing)
(organ music) (choir singing)

- Oh, God, most merciful and gracious of whose bounty we have all received. Accept this offering of thy people. Remember in thy love those who have brought it, and those for whom it is given. And so follow it with thy blessing that it may promote peace and Goodwill among persons and advance the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

- The Lord is with you. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Lift up your hearts. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- Oh God. It is right. That we should always and everywhere give you thanks and praise. Only you are God, you created all things and called them good. You made us in your own image. Even when we rebelled against your love, you did not desert us. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our God and King and spoke to us through your prophets. Therefore, we joined the entire company of heaven and all your people now on earth in worshiping and glorifying you. Holy Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might. And my heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. We thank you Holy God, that you love the world so much that you sent your only Son to be our Savior. The Lord of all life came to live among us. He healed and taught people, ate with sinners and won for you a new people by water and the Spirit. We saw his glory. Yet He humbled himself in obedience to your will freely accepting death on a cross. By dying He freed us from unending death. By rising from the dead He gave us everlasting life. We remember that on the night in which he gave himself up for us. The Lord Jesus took bread after giving you thanks He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "Take eat. This is my body, which is given for you." And the supper was over. He took the cup. Again, He returned thanks to you gave the cup to his disciples and said, "Drink from this, all of you. This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood poured out for you. And for many, for the forgiveness of sins.' When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we experience a new, the presence of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and look forward to his coming in final victory. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- We remember and proclaim with gratitude Holy God, what your Son has done for us in His life and death, in His Resurrection and Ascension. Accept our sacrifice of praise and Thanksgiving and union with Christ offering for us as a reasonable and Holy surrender of ourselves. Send the power of your Holy Spirit on us. Gathered here out of love for you and on these gifts, help us know in the breaking of this bread, the presence of Christ who gave His body and blood for all people make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in service to all humanity. (crowd chattering indistinctly)

- In unity with Christ and each other we pray our Father in Heaven. Holy be your name. Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as in Heaven, give us today the bread we need. Forgive us, our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil, the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

- Because there is one loaf we many as we are one body, for it is one loaf of which we all partake when we break the bread. Is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ?

- When we give thanks over the cup, is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ?

- Body of Christ (organ music)

- The member of the choir will now receive at the first table which we will share this morning. I ask you simply to observe the choir as they gather in two circles around the alter to share in this Blessed Supper. And then the ushers will assist you, to gather around the table of our Lord in like manner, in two circles, and then to return to your places by the side aisles. First those in the choir, and then those in the transepts. And then those in the main part of the Knave, as we receive the body and the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (inaudible footsteps) (soft organ music) (inaudible organ music) (choir singing) (organ music)

- The word says, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another arise my dear friends in Christ. And as you have received these gifts of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. May His light shine in you. Warm your hearts and minds. And may you share His love and His life with others? Amen. (inaudible chatter)

- Mm hmm If there are any among us who need or desire to be served, the bread and the wine where you're seated, please indicate this. And we will be pleased to serve you. (inaudible)