

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 2, 2020

For video viewing of music and service go to:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEO_pAVddaeV1_dOvvUd5eITX0IJKxqmM

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P: Let us pray together:

C: *Glorious God, your generosity waters the world with goodness, and you cover creation with abundance. Awaken in us a hunger for the food that satisfies both body and spirit, and with this food fill all the starving world; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

***THE FIRST LESSON**

Isaiah 55:1-5

Thus says the Lord:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you,

because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you."

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ-- I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

There's no such thing as a deserted place. There might be places without people, but they are hardly deserted. Deserted islands still have plants, birds, the occasional castaway or volleyball with a painted-on face. Deserts are in fact teeming with life that has adapted to thrive in the harsh conditions. Even space, usually thought of as endless stretches of vacuum and nothingness filling unimaginable expanses of emptiness between relative specks of stars and planets, is not as empty as scientists long believed. Have you heard of dark matter?

Astronomers started to realize that the model of the universe they had been building, based on the theories and math of folks like Albert Einstein, along with the stuff they were able to prove with particle accelerators and lots more math, weren't holding up - not completely. The Hubble telescope was providing some data that didn't fit the models. By looking at the ancient light of supernovas just now reaching us, and by looking at the rate at which distant galaxies were spinning, they could see that something didn't add up: the galaxies were spinning faster than the force of gravity, and so they should have torn themselves apart; but they hadn't. What was holding everything together? Was there actually something in the nothing?

And so, after further experiments, star-study, and - you guessed it - math, the astrophysics community began to talk about dark energy and dark matter, forces that they still can't fully define or explain, but whose existence they have proven. Dark matter doesn't absorb, reflect, or emit light. It doesn't interact with electromagnetic forces. It can only be detected by the gravitational effect it has on other, "normal" matter. In other words, by itself it is undetectable by any means we have; we only know it's there through the effect it has on the rest of the universe.

There's really no such thing as a deserted place. There is everything from microscopic life and subatomic particles up to expanding galaxies and unseen forces. There is matter and energy and all the spheres of creation thrumming in intricate harmonies, including the frequencies we can't even perceive. And that doesn't even begin to address the presence of Christ.

The creation stories of Genesis describe how God lovingly brought order to chaos and relationship to all the created universe. The Bible is not a science textbook; it's more concerned with the who than the how. But it does speak to the origin of everything - God the Creator. God spoke the creation into being through the Word, with the Spirit hovering and stirring things up, blowing the winds of new life. And the Word through which all things came into being took on flesh in a manger in Bethlehem, as God became incarnate in Jesus, the Christ.

But that's not all - Christ is present in all of creation, but there is nothing and nowhere that is foreign to Christ. One of our seminary professors, Dr. Duane Priebe, laid it out something like this: When Christ died on the cross, he descended to the dead, into hell. As the Creeds say, on the third day he rose again; which means that, during those three dark days, the presence of Christ among the dead also brought that realm under his authority, too. And then Christ ascended into heaven, so now even heaven is under the reign of the incarnate Jesus, sitting at the right hand of God.

So, whether we're talking physics or metaphysics, modern day science or the three-layered, heaven-earth-hell view of the world of the ancients, Christ is Lord of all. Christ's presence is all in all. There is no such thing as a deserted place; Christ is with us.

After hearing about the death of his cousin, John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to a boat to take him to a deserted place. But his presence drew the

crowds to follow him. It didn't stay deserted; it never really was deserted. And when the day turned towards dinner time, the disciples said to Jesus, despite the thousands, despite the crowds, "This is a deserted place - send them away so they can buy food." But Jesus knew that, with God, there is no such thing as a deserted place.

And yet...we sinful humans excel at the creation of deserted places. We create places deserted of generosity, saying, let them go buy their own food - we don't have enough. While at the same time our nation wastes football stadiums full of food each year while others around the world and in our neighborhoods are hungry. We create deserted places full of isolation and factions, ostracizing some individuals or groups or peoples, and for what? To what end? For example, the Christian sin of anti-Semitism just won't seem to die, despite even the apostle Paul in today's reading from Romans extolling the Israelites and God's ongoing faithfulness to them.

We create deserted places full of superiority in the same way, putting ourselves above others. While we heard the prophet, Isaiah, declare to a people returning from exile, no less, that they will call nations they do not know and that nations that do not know them will run to them, because of God. God shows no partiality; why do we? And - more so lately, it seems - we create places deserted of compassion.

When Jesus sees the crowds on the shore waiting for him, he has compassion on them. He heals them. The word in Greek that is translated as "compassion" literally means something like gut-love-empathy. It's a love that comes from your core, passionately, aligned with the needs and the sufferings of others. Jesus shows compassion on the crowds. He shows compassion on the world, from the cross. And yet, in today's polarized climate, compassion seems more and more scarce.

Dr. Priebe went on to say that we create our own hells on earth, if you define hell as separation from God. When we create these miserable deserted places and systems and mindsets, Christ dies and descends into them to assert his authority over them, and then redeems and raises each hell, each deserted place, back to new life through his gracious presence.

So: you have us human beings who create deserted places, being loved and saved by God, for whom there is no such thing as a deserted place, through Christ. And it is at this point in my message for you today that this becomes a stewardship sermon.

Stewardship isn't just about a program in the fall to make budgets and encourage folks to give money. (Although your offerings are important and appreciated to accomplish the ministry God has given us in Mechanicsville and beyond.) Stewardship is year-round, a state of mind, an attitude, a foundation, a way of life. And it all starts with God. God creates us, calls us good, and makes everlasting covenants of sure and steadfast love with us, that God will never break. By grace God gives us all we need, through Jesus. Jesus passes it along to his disciples. The disciples pass it along to the hungry and hurting crowds, even when they don't think there's enough. And the crowds share

what little they have with Jesus, who takes their offerings, looks to heaven, blesses them, multiplies them, and distributes them once more. It's a cycle of grace, this stewardship thing.

When we create deserted places, Jesus comes down, meets us where we're at, invites us to sit down, and multiplies bread. People eat, and are filled. There are baskets of leftovers remaining. There is abundance. To the deserted places full of pain and hurt, Jesus brings healing, even during this long pandemic. To the places deserted of generosity Jesus brings abundance and joy. To the deserted places of isolation and factions Jesus brings reconciliation, self-sacrifice, and unity in the midst of diversity. To the deserted places of superiority Jesus brings humility, the Golden Rule, and the cross.

To the places deserted of compassion Jesus brings just that: gut-love empathy, the full Passion of God the creator of galaxies, aligned with the needs and sufferings of you and me and every person, every facet of creation. And God then invites us into a cycle of compassionate stewardship to be God's agents of presence to a humanity that excels at making deserted places.

For God, there is no such thing as a deserted place. Christ's presence permeates this creation, and we are called to reveal that presence through our own words and deeds so that, unlike dark matter, it's unmistakable that God is at work.

***NICENE CREED**

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen**
**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen**

***PRAYERS**

A: Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *(A brief silence.)*

A: You take resources that appear to be meager, bless them, and there is enough. May your church trust that what you bless and ask us to share with the world is abundantly sufficient. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Your bountiful creation offers sustenance and life for all creatures. Protect this abundance for the well-being of all. Reverse the damage we have caused your creation (local needs may be named). Replenish ground water supplies, provide needed rains in places of drought, and protect forests from wildfires. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You offer yourself to all the nations and peoples of the earth, inviting everyone to abundant life. Bring the prophetic vision to fullness, that all nations will run to you and that nations who do not know you will find their joy in you. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Hear the anguish of tender hearts who cry to you in suffering and satisfy their deepest needs. Bring wholeness and healing to those who suffer in body, heart, soul, and mind (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You offer freely the fullness of salvation. Give our congregation (name) such a welcoming heart, that our words and actions may extend your free and abundant hospitality to all whom we encounter. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: God, you are life. We pray for our world, our country, our community, our church as they face the challenges of coronavirus. We pray for those who grieve the loss of love ones, for the sick and their families, for those fearful of an unknown future. We pray for the millions of unemployed, for children and others at home - that they be safe from abuse. We pray for those who are alone and isolated during this time that they may feel your loving presence. We pray for all the hospital and health care workers, and all first responders, that they receive needed supplies and be kept protected in the work they do. We pray for those making decisions about how to live into the future and when that will happen. Keep us all in your care as we wait for a new day. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of families. For all our Messiah families and especially this week for the Knepper and Kondaki families. For the talents and good things You have given each of them. Keep them united and faithful to You and each other. Guide them, protect them and equip them to do Your will. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

A: In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

***THE LORD'S PRAYER**

P: Now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to pray:

**C: *Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.***

***BENEDICTION**

P: Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

C: Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PASTOR RYAN'S 'OFFICE' HOURS

While Pastor Ryan is not physically here yet, he will be available by email at messiahmechpr@gmail.com; and by phone at (507)-360-7276 . His 'office' hours will be 11am – 8 pm our time since California is three hours behind Virginia. This is such an exciting but strange time for us as we continue to worship from afar. We wish Pastor Ryan and family a safe transition to Virginia next week! See his weekly update below.

PASTOR RYAN'S WEEKLY UPDATE

This week's update on the Radtke moving saga is that we continue to have showings on our house here, closing in on thirty in total. Still no offers. We'll be boarding a plane on Friday to head your way, so please keep your prayers coming as we hit the home stretch.

WEEKLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

Beginning March 8th, we began providing a summary of the financial well-being of our congregation. Here is this week's information:

- Contributions to general fund averaged \$2937 through July 26th (up from \$2932 on July 19th.)
- We are \$13,669.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (down from \$13,335.11 behind the budget the week prior).

REOPENING SURVEY

A reopening survey from Church Council has been sent to those with email addresses through **Survey Monkey** and a hard copy has been sent to all other members. The window for completing the survey will close this coming week. We appreciate all of you who have already responded and hope those who have yet to respond will do so in the next few days. This information will be used to help in planning for our eventual reopening.

SMALL GROUPS

Council is currently working on protocols to allow small groups such as ministry teams and Women's bible study to begin using portions of the church for their meetings. We are targeting early August for this to happen. In the next few days, all members will receive documents on "Hosting a Small Group" that will include protocols for when the meeting occurs as well as cleaning protocols before and after the meeting. We look forward to this first step in our coming together again. Stay safe until then!

CONDOLENCES

It was brought to our attention that Bee Newell, a charter member of Messiah, passed away Thursday, July 16, 2020. She was preceded in death by her husband, Grover and son, Cleve to whom the cross on the front of our building is dedicated. For those wishing to send cards to sons Roy and Scott, please contact Davina and she will provide you with their addresses. May God's loving presence be with them and their families during this difficult time.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT – IT'S SUMMERTIME!

Summer is upon us! We hope you continue your faithful giving! Please mail in your offering to the church office, 8154 Atlee Road, Mechanicsville, VA 23111, or use on-line giving through Vanco which is available on the church website. See messiahmech.com for more details.

VIRGINIA RENT AND MORTGAGE RELIEF PROGRAM (RMRP)

The Virginia Rent and Mortgage Relief Program (RMRP) is designed to support and ensure housing stability across the commonwealth during the coronavirus pandemic. Depending on availability of funds and household need, the RMRP may provide financial assistance for rent or mortgage payments for eligible households. This includes financial assistance for rent or mortgage payments past due beginning April 1, 2020 and onward. Financial assistance is a one-time payment with opportunity for renewal based on availability of funding and the household's need for additional assistance and continued eligibility. For more information please visit: Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD): www.dhcd.virginia.gov/rmrp.

BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH VIRTUAL VBS "Different by Design" JULY 27-30, 2020

Congregations of the Virginia Synod are invited to join Bethel Lutheran in Winchester for their Virtual VBS! Each morning a daily video will be made available on the Bethel Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/bethelwinchester>. It will include recorded songs, skits, animals, crafts, and more. At 6 PM Monday through Thursday, join a Zoom Crew for a fun sharing time with other campers and their families. Please note, you will have to register for the Zoom Crew. Click on the following link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NR3PZ7X> to do so! You will receive a daily link sent to your email for the Zoom Crew gathering!

CAROLINE FURNACE UPDATE

- NEW weekends added! We are open for Family Retreats through mid-September! We are grateful that Virginia continues to view outdoor activity as essential, and that we are able to provide outdoor faith, education, and renewal in a safe way. The Farmhouse, Cabin Village, and Sukkah Village are open each weekend (Thursday to Monday). Both the Farmhouse and Sukkah Village are optional no-contact retreat spaces. We can host a maximum of 5 family groups (of 10 or less) on property at once, so spaces are limited and first come, first served. Book at least two weeks in advance; 14 days of pre-screening are required for all Family Retreat participants.
- Adventure Weekends are scheduled for this fall/winter, September 18-20, October 30-November 1, and February 5-7. Until further notice, lodging is limited to one group per cabin. Tent camping is also available.

Contact Julie at (540) 449-0012 or julie@carolinefurnace.org to book a Family Retreat or reserve your Adventure Weekend cabin.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Those who would like to place announcements in our Sunday 'ebulletin' please send them to Donna Shaw at dmschow70@gmail.com by Wednesday for inclusion.