

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 16, 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: *God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

***THE FIRST LESSON**

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,

for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,

all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant--

these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;

for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,

I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

One of the planning resources that I consult sometimes, called Sundays and Seasons, made a connection this week between the Canaanite woman from our Gospel reading and Martin Luther. It talked about how Martin Luther's last words reportedly were: "We are beggars; this is true." One of Martin Luther's core principles is that there is nothing we can do to earn God's grace or merit our salvation - it is all free grace. We don't give our way into God's love; we don't accomplish our way into God's love; we don't believe our way into God's love; we can only receive, not unlike a beggar depending on the kindness of others.

The writer said that the woman is begging, too - begging for her daughter to be healed. She knew that, as a Canaanite woman, she was outside the covenants made between God and Israel. She calls Jesus "Son of David"; so she knows exactly who he is, and that there is no reason for him to help her. She knows the complicated and contentious history and relationship between the

Canaanites and the Israelites, all the way back to when Israel came to the Promised Land after their slavery in Egypt, and all the wars and idols and intermarrying that seemed to cause so much trouble and bloodshed for everyone. She knows she doesn't have any claim to a place at Jesus' table; nevertheless, she persists and insists that, perhaps, she could still receive some of the crumbs of Jesus' blessing on behalf of her suffering daughter, whom she loves with all her heart, who is tormented by a demon. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"

Jesus knows all of this too. Uncharacteristically, compared to so many other interactions with people throughout the Gospels, especially including outsiders like the Canaanite woman, he dismisses her. Jesus comes across almost callously, telling her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Marvelously, she replies, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." And Jesus says, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter is instantly healed.

Great is her faith indeed! It struck me: her faith wasn't just in Jesus' healing power; her faith was that Jesus' healing power was also for her. She who had no claim based on any law or heritage or pedigree. She who was a Canaanite. Yecch. She who was a woman, with a daughter, who had hardly any legal standing anyway. Who was she? Who was she to ask? Who was she to believe it at all possible? Yet she had faith, even faith to overcome Jesus' initial rejection. Great is her faith indeed, not just that Jesus could heal; but that Jesus would heal, for her.

I guess that's what mercy is - "Have mercy on me, Son of David!" Mercy is unmerited compassion or forbearance. Someone in a position of power, of authority, of judgment, with every reason to punish you or ignore you, cancels your debt, forgives your transgression, releases you. This is mercy. And our God is merciful, have no doubt about it. We heard Paul say today, about his fellow Jews who didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah: "For the gifts and the callings of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy."

God is merciful. Even when people don't trust God. Even when they sin. Even when they don't have the faith to ask for help. Paul wrote, "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." And, at the insistence and persistence of the Canaanite woman, Jesus takes it farther than just the people God foreknew, the people of the covenant, the people of Israel. Canaanite Shmanaite.

I guess it helps that, on some level, we are all equally crummy. All of us sinners, falling short of the glory of God. The whole encounter with the Canaanite woman happens on the heels of a confrontation Jesus has with some Pharisees. They have an issue with the disciples not washing their hands before they eat. But Jesus challenges the very basis for their criticism, calling them hypocrites. He tells the crowd: "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a

person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." In other words, laws about how you wash your hands or the food that you eat don't make you holy or good. "It all ends up in the sewer anyway," Jesus says.

What comes out of your mouth, though, starts in your heart. And at heart, all humans are prone to sinful junk regurgitating up and out through our words and actions. It's not your adherence to the law, or any other action you can take, that will save you; it's only God's grace - and God's mercy. We are all sinners.

It's right after this clash with the Pharisees that Jesus encounters the Canaanite woman. Who knows? Maybe Jesus was hangry from not getting a chance to eat that meal while he argued with the Pharisees; maybe that's what accounts for this uncomfortable reaction Jesus has for her, when usually he touches lepers and talks with the Samaritan woman at the well and heals the servants of Roman centurions without blinking an eye. None of us deserve mercy; but, following the persistent example of the Canaanite woman, we have faith not only in Jesus' power to heal, but Jesus' grace to heal, and give mercy, even to us.

I know from my phone conversations with many of you that the events taking place up and down Monument Avenue are leaving some of you feeling unsettled, to say the least. Folks' reactions and opinions on the protests and statue removals are varied and strong, and when things spill over into riots or violence, even more so. And for others, the history of violence and discrimination that overflowed into protests this time, and many times before, were beyond unsettling for years. Into this climate we have today the story of the Canaanite woman. And into this climate I saw another pastor post something provocative - "Possible sermon title for this Sunday: Canaanite lives matter."

Needless to say, the Black Lives Matter movement has stirred up some powerful opinions. Saying "Canaanite Lives Matter" might be too charged and loaded for some, and might close up your ears to anything else I have to say. But I couldn't un-see it or ignore it once I saw that pastor's post. Because, in essence, the Canaanite woman is saying, "Even though I'm on the margin, I'm still asking for mercy for my daughter. I'm still asking for God's reign of healing and justice to be for me, too. I would like us to receive the same amount of healing and justice that you offer to those lost sheep of the house of Israel. And if that's too much, I'll start with some crumbs. My daughter, my very life, is tormented. Have mercy on me."

God's grace is always unearned and free; but it is also freely offered, through the cross, to the whole world. God's promises are sure, and that gives us the ability, even the right, to ask for mercy and work for mercy for any who are tormented, on the margins, in need of healing, lacking justice.

Let's try a little thought exercise. It will start with a fill-in-the blank statement: Is God's mercy also for _____? Is God's mercy also for Canaanites? Is God's mercy also for Black Lives Matter? Is God's mercy also for white supremacists, whether they are repentant of that or not? Is God's mercy also for the unemployed, the homeless? Is God's mercy also for the opposite political party?

Is God's mercy also for immigrants, even illegal ones? Is God's mercy also for those who simply hope they are crumb-worthy?

And when I hurt someone else, is God's mercy also for me? And when you hurt someone else, is God's mercy also for you? And if anyone is just plain broken and tormented, is God's mercy also for them?

If your answer to any of these is no, that God's mercy isn't for "fill in the blank," let's have a conversation about the depth and breadth of God's mercy. I have a few Bible passages to share.

If your answer to any of these is yes, then it's time for prayer, and conversation, and listening, to discern how the distribution of God's mercy might flow through each of us. We can debate the means and methods, the rights and wrongs, the challenges and obstacles. But in the end what is not up for debate is that God's mercy has no asterisks. Anyone and everyone can shout to our Lord: "Have mercy on me!" We are all beggars; this is sure. And some of us have more limitations on our access to worldly mercy and relief; but God's mercy should find no obstruction when it comes to us who are called Christians.

My goal is not to get anybody angry; my goal is to encourage you to ponder the vast reserves of God's mercy through the lens of the story of the Canaanite woman. Isaiah declares God's desires: "Maintain justice, and do what is right..." Justice, at its simplest, is when everyone has an equal measure of God's goodness and mercy in their lives, and equal access to it. So that no one should have to assume that they are merely crumb-worthy. So that, like the Canaanite woman, all may have faith in Jesus: not just in his healing power, but that his healing is also for her. And for each one of us human beings. That she is not asking for something unreasonable, in as much as any of us sinners asking God for mercy is unreasonable. God does not withhold grace from her any more than God withholds grace from any of us; that is to say, God does not withhold grace. Period.

May God's mercy and grace find homes in our hearts, and ripple out from them in ever-widening circles. Amen.

***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: Lord, you gather the church to be part of your mission as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As Jesus acknowledged the great faith of a woman from outside his people, help your church discover and find blessing in the faith of people we might reject. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You have blessed us with the bounty of the earth. Grant your grace to all your creatures, that the earth will flourish. Relieve waters choked by garbage, renew soils stripped of nutrients, and refresh the air all creatures need to live. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You call the nations to be glad and sing for joy. Let your way be known among all the nations of the world, now divided by competing interests, contending alliances, and consumed by enormous worry. Bless us and make your face shine upon all. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You show unexpected mercy, kindness, and generosity. We pray for those who do not have enough, for outcasts in our villages, cities, and town, and for those who need your healing (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: In you we live and move and have our being. Grant our congregation Messiah Lutheran Church grace to find our life refreshed in you. Accompany us in the rhythms of late summer. Give us rest and renewal, and strengthen us for mission in your name. 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 Mason, McAlister and McKenna 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. God, the creator, + Jesus, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, bless you and keep you in eternal love

C: Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PASTOR RYAN'S 'OFFICE' HOURS

While Pastor Ryan is now physically here, he will still be self-quarantining for the first two weeks. He is available by email at messiahmechpr@gmail.com; and by phone at (507)-360-7276 . His "office hours" will be 8 am – 5 pm, and he looks forward to being in the office soon. Regular office hours and dedicated drop-in hours will be shared as soon as he can figure those out.

PASTOR RYAN'S WEEKLY UPDATE

If you watched this past Wednesday's midweek message, you might have seen that I recorded it in the sanctuary at Messiah. I made sure to wear a mask and keep my hands clean, like we expect all y'all to do when we begin worshiping at the building again, but I thought it might be nice to see something familiar in the background. I want to thank the folks who left the awesome chalk drawing welcome outside the church doors, and the amazing gift basket on my desk. I also want to thank my wife's cousin and her family who are putting us up while we wait for a permanent home. Here's an update on all of that: we received and accepted an offer that came in while we were traveling last weekend, and we were in escrow for about three days before the buyer backed out. So, back to square one. Please keep the prayers coming so we can finish things up there and finish getting settled here. ~Pastor Ryan

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 \$2887 through August 9th (up slightly from \$2864 on August 2nd).
- We are \$16,527.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (down from \$13,383.11 behind the budget the week prior).
- Weekly budget need is \$3404

LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES

As in years past, Lutheran Family Services needs our help with school supplies. Because of all the regulations, LFS has provided a link through Amazon to purchase the supplies that are needed. If you buy through Amazon, supplies will be sent directly to the LFS office. You can also buy supplies your own, bring them to church, and they will be delivered to the LFS office. Either way works. Please buy through Amazon until August 21, 2020 using this link

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/WLBH3WZPXEVQ?ref_=wl_share.

Otherwise, take supplies to church on August 23rd. There will be a box outside the Narthex doors that will be checked every two hours before dark that Sunday and then delivered on Monday. If this doesn't work for you, please call Sharon Addair at 804-543-9709 or text her and she will arrange a pick up.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS NOW GO TO DAVINA

Now that Pastor Ryan is here, please send announcements you would like to place in the Sunday e-bulletin to Davina at messiahmech@gmail.com instead of to Donna Shaw. Davina will still need them by Wednesday for inclusion in the coming Sunday's bulletin.

LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES = enCircle

Over four years ago the **Virginia Lutheran Family Services (LFSVA)** leadership and Board of Directors began a thoughtful discussion about the sustainability and growth of LFSVA because they wanted to provide their vital services to even more people. After careful consideration, the Board voted in late spring to change their business operating name to enCircle. Their legal name will remain Lutheran Family Services of Virginia, the Minnick Schools' name will not change, but the public name is evolving to include people of all backgrounds, faiths, and abilities.

MESSIAH RECEIVES FEDERAL COVID-19 LOAN

Council is pleased to announce that Messiah has received a loan of \$17,314 from the federal Paycheck Protection Program. The "PPP" provides very low interest (1%) loans to help small businesses keep their workforce during the Coronavirus crisis. Loan recipients must spend at least 60% of loan proceeds on payroll costs; the remainder must be used for mortgage and lease interests as well as certain utilities. Funds must be used by the end of 2020. If the Church meets the loan criteria for use of the funds, the federal government will forgive the full amount of the loan. We thank John Cline for his hard work and time spent to take care of the application process.

SMALL GROUPS

Hopefully everyone has received the guidelines for Small Group Meetings and Cleaning Protocols either through email or hard copy. Please contact Davina when wanting to schedule a time you would like your group to meet at church. The only areas open at this time include the Fellowship Hall, the hallway to the restrooms, and the restrooms. All other parts of the building remain 'closed' for now. There will be copies of the forms at church on the kitchen counter for you to use at your meeting along with necessary cleaning supplies. Davina will maintain the completed forms in her office. Although apart, we are still Messiah! Stay well everyone!

REOPENING SURVEY IS NOW CLOSED

Thank you to all who returned the Council Reopening Survey! We had a tremendous response, 77 members! The data has been compiled and council will begin looking at your responses and determining next steps. Stay safe and well until we are together again.

CHURCH DIRECTORY IS BEING UPDATED

Davina will be updating the church directory in the near future. Please let her know if you've had changes to your address, phone number, or email address.

LIVING LUTHERAN WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What seasonal recipes have been important to you in your faith life? By or before August 30, send your complete recipe, and 300-word story to livinglutheran@elca.org for consideration in their November theme issue on food and faith. Please include Messiah's name and location in your entry. Have fun and good luck!

REBUILD RVA GRANT PROGRAM

The Rebuild VA Grant Fund is a program to help small businesses and non-profits whose normal operations were disrupted by COVID-19, including restaurants, brick and mortar retail, exercise and fitness facilities, personal care and personal grooming services, entertainment and public amusement establishments, and campgrounds. Businesses and non-profits that are approved for a Rebuild VA grant may receive up to 3 times their average monthly eligible expenses up to a maximum of \$10,000.

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.

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.