

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 30, 2020

For video viewing of today's service go to:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEO_pAVddaeV1_dOvvUd5eITX0IJKxgmM

OPENING HYMN: "Come and Fill Our Hearts" (sing twice)

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
You alone, O Lord, are holy.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
Alleluia!

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P: Let us pray together:

C: *O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

***THE FIRST LESSON**

Jeremiah 15:15-21

O Lord, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.

In your forbearance do not take me away;
know that on your account I suffer insult.

Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart;

for I am called by your name,
O Lord, God of hosts.

I did not sit in the company of merry-makers,
nor did I rejoice;

under the weight of your hand I sat alone,
for you had filled me with indignation.

Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?

Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail.

Therefore, thus says the Lord:

If you turn back, I will take you back,
and you shall stand before me.

If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
you shall serve as my mouth.

It is they who will turn to you,
not you who will turn to them.

And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;

they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,

for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,

says the Lord.

I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

Have you ever heard of the term "cognitive dissonance"? It's used to describe the mental discomfort you feel when two conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes come head to head in your mind. Maybe a long-held belief is challenged. Maybe someone that had an impact on your values has a fall from grace, making you question things. Maybe you find your own attitude on some topic changing, and that makes you feel uncomfortable. "Cognitive dissonance" describes those conflicted, uncomfortable, uneasy feelings. You know, I had every intention of being a little silly this week. I was going to talk about how cognitive dissonance is like when you're playing pinball and the machine gets jostled around too much and says "TILT!" and locks up. Your brain can't handle the two conflicting thoughts, and you just kind of go "TILT." I was going to show you this [for the folks reading this at home, it's a short-looped video of a comedian making a silly confused face], and say, "And that's the moment the cognitive dissonance hits." But I'm undergoing a little too much cognitive dissonance of my own this week to stick with the silly plan. Sorry folks - I wanted to!

More on my own TILT situation later. Cognitive dissonance by itself is a normal thing that everyone experiences at some point, to varying degrees. It can become tricky, though, with how we handle it. Cognitive dissonance is an internal confrontation between two contradictory beliefs, and that's distressing. Most folks don't like confrontation with other people, let alone within themselves. Most folks don't want to live with the tension of two incompatible beliefs, so they often end up either rejecting one of the thoughts outright, explaining it away

through acrobatic feats of rationalization, or simply avoiding any new information, ever, that could potentially challenge their views.

If you've ever explained, to yourself or others, why it was ok to not follow your doctor's orders just this once, that's handling cognitive dissonance. My mom was good at that - she had high cholesterol, high blood pressure, you name it - but she could usually justify why it was a special enough occasion to have a steak or a cheeseburger, every other week. Or maybe you've done something that you felt embarrassed about, and then tried to hide it from other people. Or maybe you go along with a policy at work that you don't agree with, but you don't want to lose your job. Maybe it's easier to just scroll past the news items that make you uncomfortable, or only watch the news channels that say the things you agree with. I don't think that's how the news used to work; but it does now.

It's much, much harder, to wrestle with a hard truth, with a reality that challenges your worldview, with information that upsets your carefully curated apple cart. And yet, God renamed Jacob "Israel," which means "strives or wrestles with God." And we are faith-descendants of the people and covenants of Israel, fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. So, I'm confident that God wants us to wrestle, through our faith, with the things in this world that make us uncomfortable, that we'd rather avoid or explain away, too.

This comes to a head in our Gospel reading. Jesus tells the disciples that he will go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the faith leaders, and be killed, and then be raised. And Peter's brain goes TILT. Because he just confessed in the previous paragraph that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of the Living God. That's Peter's worldview - Jesus is the Messiah who will fulfill the promises, defeat the Romans, restore Israel, all of it. And now Jesus is saying he's going to - that he must - suffer and die. And those two thoughts do not go together. So, Peter reacts to this cognitive dissonance by trying to smother and reject the half he doesn't like: "Jesus, stop this! This can't happen!"

And Jesus comes right back - "Get behind me Satan! Don't tempt me away from this! You are setting your mind on human things and not divine things." So, there's your measuring stick: when it comes to faith and discipleship and ethics and being a child of God in this world, when you encounter cognitive dissonance, when you need to wrestle with a conflict, you need to err on the side of the divine perspective. Pick up your cross and follow me. Deny yourselves and find your life in me. Put to death the beliefs, the values, the attitudes, that are contrary to the gospel, to the kingdom of heaven, to the grace that God shows to you. Let them die on the cross and be raised to new life in Christ.

Jeremiah also has a dissonant reaction in our reading today. He says, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the light of my heart." But then Jeremiah finds himself persecuted and isolated, under the weight of God's hand. He is indignant: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like

a deceitful brook, like waters that fail." Much like Peter, when Jeremiah's idea of what life in service to God would be like clashes with the reality of being a prophet to a stick-necked people, his reaction is one of anger - make this go away, God! You failed me! Jeremiah rejects the parts he doesn't like.

God knows us through and through. And when God sees us rationalizing or ignoring or rejecting divine things like cross-bearing or truth-telling, God intervenes. First with a hard truth: despite what you might have heard or told yourself, there is no promise in scripture, Old Testament or New, anywhere, that by being a Christian or a believer in God, that your life will be problem-free and easy. There is still evil at work in the world. There is still suffering. There are still problems. We might ignore them, but they are still there. We might rationalize away how they're not our responsibility, or that they are too big for us to handle, but we are still called to respond and work for God's will and God's kingdom to come about in and among and through us, too.

God doesn't tell Jeremiah, "I'll make those mean people leave you alone." But he does say that he'll make Jeremiah like a bronze wall so he can handle them. Jesus doesn't tell Peter, "You know, you're right - how silly of me! There must be an easier way to redeem all of creation and forgive all of humanity's sins. Let's get lunch." But he does say, "those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

That's the hard truth part. But God follows that up with grace. God doesn't promise prosperity and ease; but God does promise to be with us through it all, thick and thin, good and bad, clear sailing and cognitive dissonance alike. The Holy Spirit will help us re-set our minds from human things to divine things, as often as necessary. God promises life, and then asks us to promote life. God blesses us to be a blessing. Martin Luther called it "alien righteousness." We can't handle the cognitive dissonance on our own. We'll struggle and make mistakes and rationalize and ignore and reject and avoid and get told, "Get behind me, Satan!" But God will intervene and show us a different way; a divine way, and inject us with righteousness we can't achieve on our own.

Enter our reading from Romans, a playbook for navigating cognitive dissonance. The measuring stick we need. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all...No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'"

Peter and Jeremiah both experience cognitive dissonance when their ideas of how life in service to God should look crash up against reality. Both of them basically tell God, "No! Not like this!" And God says, "Yes. Like this. But I

will be with you." There will be persecution and suffering in your life of discipleship. There will be wrestling. But just as Jesus died for us while we were still sinners and far from perfect, so we must overcome evil with good. Not by rejecting it or avoiding it or explaining it away. But by engaging the difficulties of the world with love. By outdoing one another in showing honor rather than tearing each other down when we disagree. By exemplifying grace in action. By referring back to scripture and honestly checking ourselves in community with one another about what the "divine things" would be in any given situation. And, according to Jesus' words and actions, the divine things involve picking up a cross and denying ourselves.

And that brings me back to my own personal TILTed cognitive dissonance. Black people keep getting shot. I believe this is wrong. I believe that there are deep-seated, systemic problems that lead to this. I believe things need to change, fundamentally, when it comes to race and prejudice in our country. I believe that unvarnished, unbiased history is important and shouldn't be swept under the rug; but I also believe there are parts of it we don't need to elevate to the level of memorializing or celebrating. I believe that if I were a person of color, living in this situation every day and with generations of similar experiences as a part of my heritage, I'd be angry and scared and calling for change too. I'd be protesting. Maybe I should be anyway, if this is what I believe? I believe that athletes boycotting or protesting aren't being ungrateful. I also believe that police officers need to be safe, and trained, and equipped, and protected. I believe that they have a dangerous job and need to make hard decisions and lay down their lives to protect their communities. My father-in-law was a chief of police; a member of our wedding party and a godparent to our children are both in law enforcement. I am not against police. But clearly something is wrong. I believe that armed men stormed into the state capitols in Michigan and Idaho and weren't shot, and one type of cognitive dissonance response explains why they were ok. to do that. I believe that unarmed black people are shot on a regular basis, and that another type of cognitive dissonance response explains why that is ok, too. But it's not ok. It can't be. And yet people I know and love, friends and family and parishioners, say and post things that explain it all away. And I'm angry at them. I'm flabbergasted that they don't see things the way I see them. I want to reject them and surround myself with only people who think like me. And I'm afraid that by saying all of this I will cause others, even some of you, to reject me because I don't think like them, or you. I wonder what I'm wrong about. I feel like I see pictures and videos with my own eyes, read facts and figures and histories that are verified and true, and that the divine response would be to pick up a cross, set aside my own discomfort at the prospect of such sweeping reforms that are being called for and having to admit that I'm part of these systems, even passively. And then I'm met with wave after wave of people I love, or humans I've never met but am called to love anyway, who see the world in the exact opposite ways that I do. Are they my enemies now? Are we that incapable of harmony? Am I supposed to heap burning

coals of kindness on them? Has it become impossible to see things from others' perspectives and put yourself in others' shoes? Am I acting wiser than I am and I need to check myself?

And this is just a fraction of what's going on my head, and the cognitive dissonance I am struggling with on how to love my neighbors, both the ones getting shot, the ones protesting, the ones who agree with me, the ones who think I'm deluded or misled or just plain wrong.

And so, I'll come back to Paul's playbook. The evil we need to overcome with good isn't just the suffering and the violence and the injustice - but we are indeed called to pick up crosses and deny ourselves and love until these insidious evils are banished into oblivion. But we also need to overcome this evil of impasse and the evil of resistance to harmony and reconciliation. I sincerely believe that the devil is rejoicing at our conflict and division, and encouraging it. Overcoming evil with good, in this instance, means that we don't immediately jump to rejecting, or rationalizing away, or ignoring the beliefs we don't agree with, or that make us uncomfortable - or the people who hold those beliefs. Rather, we pray for God to intervene, to teach us grace, and to walk with us through it all. I welcome any conversations that come from this sermon. And I pray: come, Holy Spirit, and set our minds, and our hearts, on divine things, not on human things. Amen.

SERMON SONG: "Will You Come and Follow Me" - v 1-2, 5

"Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"

"Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare, should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer pray'r in you and you in me?"

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

***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: God of faithfulness, you bid your people to follow Jesus. Set the mind of your
church on divine things. Grant us trust in you, that we lose our lives for the sake
of Christ and thereby discover joy in life through him. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: God of wonder, the earth is yours and all that is in it. Heal your creation and
give us eyes to see the world as you do. As the seasons change, pattern the
rhythm of our lives in harmony with all creation. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: God of all nations, you call us to live peaceably with all. Give us ears to hear
one another, even those we name as enemies. Fill all leaders with mercy and
understanding, that they advocate and genuinely care for those who are poor
and most vulnerable in their communities. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: God of salvation, you promise to deliver us. Give those who suffer a strong sense of your presence and love. Accompany those who are uncertain, raise the spirits of those who are despairing, and heal the sick (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: God of community, you call us to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer. Make our congregation a workshop of your love. When we quarrel, bring reconciliation. Help us overcome evil with good. 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 Norman, Pfohl and Philp 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*

CLOSING HYMN: "O Jesus, I Have Promised" – v. 1-2

O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
remain forever near me, my master and my friend.
I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

Oh, let me feel you near me; the world is ever near.
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, then draw nearer to shield my soul from sin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PASTOR RYAN'S 'OFFICE' HOURS

Pastor Ryan is still figuring out the best balance between in-person office hours and working from home. Wherever he happens to be, 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 setting some set regular office hours and dedicated drop-in hours soon.

PASTOR RYAN'S WEEKLY UPDATE

We're pretty much holding steady this week on the house-selling front. Still waiting on repair requests and the like, but still moving forward. We are ready to book moving companies and flights as soon as we have a final lock, but we haven't received that word yet. The timing of things is still topsy-turvy, but God is good and things are coming together.

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 \$2843 through August 23rd (down slightly from \$2853 on August 16th).
- We are \$19,065.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (down from \$18,176.11 behind the budget the week prior).
- Weekly budget need is \$3404.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS NOW GO TO DAVINA

After many, many months of being the go-to person for announcements, we thank Donna Shaw for all her time and energy making sure everyone is in the loop. Now that Pastor Ryan has some office time, we're going back to having announcements "in-house." So, please send any 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.

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.

REOPENING SURVEY IS BEING REVIEWED

Thank you to all who returned the Council Reopening Survey! We had a tremendous response, 77 members! Council is looking at your responses and determining next steps. Stay safe and well until we are together again, and stay tuned for updates.

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.

REFER COLLEGE STUDENTS TO CAMPUS MINISTRY

Finding a faith community in college can be difficult and finding a faith community in college in the midst of COVID can be even more difficult. Therefore, the Virginia Lutheran Campus Ministry Network wants to be sure we find ways to connect our Lutheran college students together with campus ministries and other students. Therefore, please provide contact information to the Virginia Lutheran Campus Ministry Network through the following link: tiny.cc/valutheranstudent.

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!

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 are thankful for the PPP loan, but our giving has been in decline through these summer quarantine months. Thank you for the generosity you have shown, and please continue your faithful giving as we get closer to being back together again! 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.