

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 6, 2020

For video viewing of music and service go to:

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

GATHERING SONG: “Built on a Rock” – v. 1-3

Built on a rock the church shall stand, even when steeples are falling; crumbled have spires in ev'ry land, bells still are chiming and calling--calling the young and old to rest, calling the souls of those distressed, longing for life everlasting.

Surely, in temples made with hands God the Most High is not dwelling--high in the heav'ns his temple stands, all earthly temples excelling. Yet he who dwells in heav'n above deigns to abide with us in love, making our bodies his temple.

Christ builds a house of living stones: we are his own habitation; he fills our hearts, his humble thrones, granting us life and salvation. Where two or three will seek his face, he in their midst will show his grace, blessings upon them bestowing.

Text: Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig, 1783-1872; tr. Carl Doving, 1867-1937, adapt.
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***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P: Let us pray together:

C: O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

***THE FIRST LESSON**

Ezekiel 33:7-11

You, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, “O wicked ones, you shall surely die,” and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?” Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no

pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

I have served on a jury exactly one time. It was back in Minnesota, a couple of years into our first call. And, naturally, it was during Lent.

You might not know this, but the busiest time of year for a pastor – for a Lutheran pastor, at least – is Lent. There are usually extra services, maybe an extra Bible study, Holy Week and Easter preparations are being made, you still never really recovered from the Christmas season...it's a full time.

So, like most folks when they receive a jury summons in the mail, my first reaction was – not now! Which maybe isn't fair. Jury duty has its pros and cons, but it's an important responsibility and an important function of citizenship to carry out. Still, my first instinct was to try to figure out if I could or should get out of it or postpone it or something, because, well...Lent.

However, I was just one member of a staff of seven people at that church. We had folks to help watch the kids. I could get this done and over with – if they even called me in! – before we got to the busiest part of the season. So I called the number. I put in the code. And sure enough there was a case, and I was called in. But maybe they wouldn't need me for the jury? There's a whole pool, right? Nope, I was on the jury. But maybe I could just participate and someone else take the lead? Nope. I'm an overachiever. I ended up being the foreman. And so it began.

The case itself didn't seem like it was a very high-stakes kind of thing. Without getting in to it too much, it had to do with whether the person driving a borrowed car knew about the illegal stuff on the floor of the backseat, even threw it in the backseat when they got pulled over, or if it had just been there the whole time. So we heard lots of witnesses about the various stops the car made that night, and who got in and out of the car, and so on. Frankly, the defendant seemed plenty sketchy. But: so did the witnesses! It was a muddy mess. There wasn't a lot of actual evidence, and the prosecution didn't prove their case beyond reasonable doubt, so the jury agreed to find the defendant not guilty. The whole thing took only a few days. Not so bad, right?

I got to go back to my busy Lent and my normal life pretty quickly. But there was a good chance that the folks involved in the trial wouldn't have. The thing that stayed with me after serving on a jury, that I still think about today, was the full weight of the responsibility we had as jurors: the decision we made would have a profound effect on the defendant's life, one way or another. It's not like it was a murder trial or anything like that; but we could have sent someone to prison. Or, what if we made a mistake? We went in a little room and had to weigh the testimony and the arguments made by the lawyers and the specific wording of the law, and it just really hit me: we have this person, this stranger's life in our hands. And it was a very surreal, very humbling feeling.

It's a lot to have someone's life in your hands. And in our Gospel reading today, Jesus tells the disciples – and by extension, us – that we have people's lives in our hands, all the time. After talking about how to reconcile with members of the church that have sinned against you, Jesus says this: "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." These are the same "keys of the kingdom" given to Peter a couple of weeks ago, but now we have them on our keychains, too.

If someone sins against you, and they won't own up to it, you could bind them to that sin here on earth. You could hold them to it. If you are estranged from someone, and you can't patch things up, you could bind them to that estrangement here on earth, bind them to some kind of banishment from your

life. If you try to reconcile with someone who has hurt you, and you find that you have irreconcilable differences, you could bind them to that impasse, that separation, here on earth. And somehow our binding/loosing decisions are also binding in heaven? Talk about responsibility! Talk about a weight! Talk about holding someone's life in your hands. That makes jury duty seem like a walk in the park! And get this: if you're all in community together as brothers and sisters in Christ, then guess what? They hold your life in their hands, too.

And that brings me to last week, when I talked about cognitive dissonance. And I shared this whole laundry list of things that I can't make sense of lately. I shared this whole list of people and their actions that I can't wrap my head around. And I talked about what seems like our shared civic and national inability to reconcile with one another anymore, our inability to see things from other people's perspectives and points of view. The sin of not going to the cross for one another. And now we hear that whatever we bind on earth is bound in heaven. What I bind for others is bound in heaven. What others bind for me is bound in heaven. As I look around the world today, I don't see a lot of loosing.

In the context of today's reading, what does this mean? If no one listens to each other anymore, if no one even attempts to reconcile any more but just drives the divisions deeper and draws the lines more starkly, then we're really in a bind. I served on a jury for a case about a minor infraction, and I felt the weight of responsibility that I was holding someone else's life in my hands. We've been given the keys to the ever-loving kingdom of heaven! If I feel like someone is sinning, then like Ezekiel I'm supposed to call it out, or I'm just as bad. I hold others' lives in my hands if I feel like they've sinned. And others hold my life in their hands if they feel like I've sinned.

We're all adults here; a jury of mutual peers. What could go wrong? Luckily, Jesus wasn't done talking.

Jesus says, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Did you catch the most important part? "In my name." We gather together, keys in hand, in Jesus' name. Whatever we bind or loose or pray about it, we do it in Jesus' name. And Jesus is there among us as we do so. It's not us versus them. We hold each other's lives in our hands. We're all in this together, not bound to our sins but bound together by the one who came down to save us from those sins, Jesus the Christ.

God will give us whatever we ask – even in the binding and loosing department – so long as we ask it in Jesus' name. And if you ask God for something in Jesus' name, it will have to align with everything Jesus' name represents – salvation for sinners, forgiveness for sinners, a cross for sinners, love for sinners.

Jesus says that if the person who sinned against you doesn't listen to you, and doesn't listen to you plus two or three others, and still doesn't listen to you after you plus the whole church try to intervene, then you need to treat that one like a Gentile or a tax-collector. And you know what? Jesus asked a tax-collector to

follow him and made him a disciple. His name was Matthew. Jesus ate with tax-collectors and sinners, like Zacchaeus. Jesus healed the Canaanite woman's daughter. He offered the Samaritan woman the water of life. He healed the centurion's servant. He sent Peter and Paul to share the good news with Gentiles. That's our role model when it comes to binding and loosing.

Paul breaks it down for us once again in our passage from Romans. If you feel like you're a permanent member of a jury, judging the sins of others to determine whether you will bind or loose, getting sucked into this increasingly legalistic, irreconcilable, judg-y world, Paul reminds you what the law looks like in Jesus' name. "The commandments...are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

The only way we can handle the keys to the kingdom is to use them in Jesus' name. The only way we can navigate the binding and loosing is to do so in Jesus' name. The only way we can reconcile with others is to talk to them, be honest with them, be honest with ourselves, and treat them like Gentiles and tax-collectors. And the only way we are called to respond to this legalistic, polarized, irreconcilable, cognitively dissonant world – the only way we can work healing in this world – is: in...Jesus'...name.

You know, I have no idea what happened to the folks involved in that case I was on a jury for. But I still think about that feeling of responsibility. That feeling of having their future, their life, in our hands. Whether we realize it or not, we put ourselves on jury duty all the time, binding and loosing and tallying people's sins, while everyone else is doing the same exact thing with us. We put others' lives in our hands. Do you ever feel the weight of that responsibility? I usually don't. But maybe I need to start feeling it.

We are all in this together, even when the world tries to drive wedges between us. And since we are all in this together – even when we forget that fact, even when we don't treat each other as such – Jesus is there among us, and we love in Jesus' name. Our lives are in each other's hands, and we can proceed with love, because we know, without a doubt, that we are in God's hands. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: "Change My Heart, O God" – sing twice

Change my heart oh God,
Make it ever true.
Change my heart oh God,
May I be like You.

You are the potter,
I am the clay,
Mold me and make me,
This is what I pray.

***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: Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *(A brief silence.)*

A: Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in this community (especially). Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Lord, in your

mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit (especially) Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labor. Help us to love our neighbors in and through our work. 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 loved 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 Porter & Radtke 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: Mothering God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.

C: Amen

SENDING SONG: "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" – v. 1 & 3

Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of Love!

Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, praising thee, their sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the gloom of doubt away.

Giver of immortal gladness fill us with the light of day.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,

Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!

Thou are Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine;

Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine!

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

Things are happening! The repair requests for the CA house were signed and accepted. A moving company is booked and so is a flight for Pastor Ryan and his cousin-in-law to fly out, finish packing the house, and load the trailer. If all goes smoothly, the Radtkes' stuff will be moved to Virginia by the end of the month! Pastor Ryan will be gone for around a week, but worship recordings will keep being provided. Next step: figuring out where to live here! Stay tuned!

DRIVE-IN RALLY DAY WORSHIP ON SEPTEMBER 20TH!

Good news! After reviewing all of the worship surveys and reviewing all the guidelines and recommendations of the Governor's office, the Synod, and our insurance carrier, we're excited to announce that we'll hold a drive-in Rally Day worship service on Sunday, September 20th, at the usual 10:45 am! We have a nifty FM transmitter microphone so you can listen in your cars like a drive-in theater.

Kids, bring your backpacks and devices for a quarantine-style blessing of the backpacks! And everyone else, stay tuned for more details next week on what else to bring along. We're thrilled to be back together soon!

We are also working on plans for the following week, September 27th. We are hoping to begin in-person worship in the Fellowship Hall that day, but still use the FM transmitter for anyone who isn't comfortable coming in yet. You can still follow along in the parking lot, and see & be seen by everyone! And rest assured that we will continue to provide online worship services and mailed-out hard copies for those who aren't ready or aren't able to come in person yet.

We'll still be following social distance and face covering guidelines, and we're still working the bugs out – but we'll be working it out TOGETHER! In person! Thanks be to God!

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 \$2791 through August 30th (down from \$2843 on August 23rd).
- We are \$21,429.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (up from \$19,065.11 behind the budget the week prior).
- Weekly budget need is \$3404.00.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS NOW GO TO DAVINA

We'll run this reminder one more time – thanks to Donna Shaw for being a faithful steward of the announcements for so long. But we're back to doing announcements "in-house" again. So, please send any announcements you would like to place in the Sunday e-bulletin to Davina at messiahmech@gmail.com. Davina will 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.

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.

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE: HURRICANE LAURA AND CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

Following the devastation caused by Hurricane Laura in Louisiana and parts of Texas, as well as the impact of wildfires across California, Lutheran Disaster Relief (LDR) is responding.

You can help LDR as they assist the communities who have been impacted by these natural disasters, through prayer and giving through [Lutheran Disaster Relief](#).

Your gifts designated for "[Hurricane Response](#)" or "[U.S. Wildfires](#)" will be used entirely (100%) for direct response until it is complete. Together, we can help provide immediate and long-lasting support for those whose lives have been impacted by hurricanes or wildfires.

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!

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 – COMING BACK

We are getting closer to having some form of being together again. Small groups have been meeting, and soon we'll be worshipping together. As we come back together in person, we also encourage you, prayerfully and as you are able, to come back in your giving, too. Thank you for the generosity you have already shown through these difficult times! 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. Thank you!