

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 26, 2020

For video viewing of music and service go to:

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

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P: Let us pray together:

C: *Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

***THE FIRST LESSON**

1 Kings 3:5-12

⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

¹⁰It pleased the LORD that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 8:26-39

²⁶The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

³¹[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." ³³He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." ⁵²And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

Does anyone remember those "Choose Your Own Adventure" books? They were really big when I was a kid, but I guess they never really went away. The idea is that you read along, following the story, with "You" as the central character. Every few pages or so, you'd reach a break, like the end of a chapter, and you'd be faced with a choice. If you picked one option, you'd turn to one page; if you picked the other option, you'd turn to a different page. Then you'd read a few more pages or paragraphs and be confronted with another choice, and another, and another. And the pages and sections were scrambled, so you'd be jumping all over the book, back and forth.

At some point you'd reach an ending. There were at least a dozen different endings in each book. And, since the books usually involved some type of action or adventure or science fiction, a lot of the endings involved you getting blasted by a laser or getting arrested in a case of mistaken identity or some other sort of calamity. Some of the endings would be happy. Some of them would just kind of stop abruptly. And then you could start the story over, and make different choices, and get different endings. They were fun books with lots of surprises. They still make them, and Netflix even has some choose-your-own-adventure style shows.

Choose Your Own Adventure books were fun, in part, because they were random. They were unpredictable and exciting. You never knew where your path would lead. But they were still fiction. Sometimes life can feel like a Choose Your Own Adventure book. And, while the unexpected can sometimes end up being a blessing, usually random chance doesn't feel quite as fun in real life. You don't want to make a choice in life, turn the page, and all of a sudden encounter a dead end, an abrupt stop to the plans you had or the life you imagined. One example: you don't want to make the decision to move to Virginia, and then turn the page and find out that, not only will that move be delayed by at least two months, but you're also in the middle of a pandemic.

You can put a lot of thought and planning into the choices you make in life, and the results can still be unpredictable. And that can make you question and doubt and second-guess yourself. Or you might get mugged by comparison, the thief of joy: why do some people's choices turn out for the best, and mine don't? Why do they get the good ending and I don't? I know I've gone down that path at times, some of them recently.

And so I lift up a holy practice today to accompany the choices we make: discernment. Discernment is the practice of prayerfully asking God to guide you in your choices. It's a word that gets used a lot by people considering becoming deacons and pastors - trying to discern God's desires for them and how God would like them to serve; but discernment is for everyone. It's asking, "Where is

God in this?" It's the ongoing process of tuning yourself to God's will. And the random and unpredictable might still happen - will still happen - but you keep coming back to discernment, the openness and receptivity to God's presence even in your life, even when things don't go according to plan.

King Solomon is counted as wise because he asks God to give him discernment: "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil..." And God blesses Solomon for asking for the understanding to discern what is right. I think it pleased God because when you seek discernment, you are seeking an ongoing relationship with God, an ongoing conversation with God, to continually discern God's will, how to love God and serve neighbor and seek what is good.

This is why Jesus tells all these parables. Because the Kingdom of Heaven isn't just one simple thing - it's a way of life. The Kingdom of Heaven isn't just some future thing - it's God's will breaking into our world in the here and now, through the Holy Spirit and through us, and we continually discern how to participate in that kingdom now, how to practice the kingdom until Jesus returns and the kingdom comes down for good. Parables are stories that show different facets of that kingdom, stories that open up meaning and open our eyes and ears and minds and hearts. Parables are invitations to discernment.

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther talks about the Lord's Prayer. For the petition, "Your kingdom come," Luther says this: "In fact, God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us." Then, for "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven," he says: "In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come about in and among us." Discernment is about asking God to help us see God's kingdom and see God's will playing out in, among, and around us. It's about asking God to help us participate.

I think cultivating a practice of discernment, of tuning into God's will and God's activity, right now, can help us navigate the choices that life confronts us with. We still might not always know the "right" choice to make, the "right" path to follow. Sometimes it will feel like a no-win situation, choosing between bad and worse. And we'll still make bad choices, or good choices that don't pan out. But we keep looking for God. We keep looking for the kingdom of heaven. We keep asking for discernment. And we know that God is with us, through it all.

This is a process, not an instantaneous internal light switch. It takes time to practice discernment. And we won't always get it right away, or all the time. Jesus tells all of these parables, and then he says to the disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" And they answer, "Yes." And I answer, "No!!!" We got Jesus's teacher's guide with all the answer the last two weeks, first with the parable of the seeds and then with the parable of the weeds. What are we supposed to do with this montage of parables? What are we supposed to discern about the Kingdom of Heaven and God's will through these?

It takes time to recognize God. It takes time to recognize that mustard seeds are like the kingdom of heaven. That something small and insignificant, a weed, can grow into something that provides shelter, a blessing for others beyond yourself. It takes practice to recognize that yeast leavening bread is like

the kingdom of heaven; unleavened bread might be the holy fare of Passover, but the leaven grows the blessing beyond that story to feed many more.

It takes a new perspective to see that one pearl or one field might be like the kingdom of heaven. How something like God's love and grace and forgiveness are worth giving everything else away for. It takes discernment to see that sorting fish from a net is like the kingdom of heaven, and how God will help us sort through the good and the bad in our lives and in our hearts.

There will be times our discernment gets out of balance. Where we say, "Whatever happens is God's will!" And we don't take enough responsibility for our choices and our kingdom-practicing. And there will be times when we take on too much responsibility, where it is all and only up to us and our choices, and our success or failure hangs by a thread attached only to our own efforts. There will be times where we act as though the kingdom of heaven is not our problem at all - God will sort it all out in heaven - when we forget that God wants to sort things out, in and among and through us, right now. God wants to bring about the kingdom of heaven in this life, too: God's work, our hands. But sometimes we are faulty instruments. And sometimes we just despair and the brokenness and randomness of the world.

I've got to say, discernment has been hard for me, for our family, these last few months. We discerned, through lots of prayer and deliberation and struggle, that coming to Mechanicsville was the path God had placed us on. That this would be the best path for our family, for our health, for our vocations of pastors and parents. But with each turn of the page it seems like we've had more delays, more setbacks, more challenges. And it feels more like a Choose Your Own Adventure some days, unpredictable.

But discernment is a process. Solomon prays for discernment only after recognizing and giving thanks for God's great and steadfast love. He gives thanks for the gifts and responsibility God trusts him with, and asks for help in using them. And Paul reminds the church in Rome that nothing - absolutely nothing - can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Even on our worst days, when we have chosen poorly or when the randomness and unpredictability of the world blows up in our faces and leaves us tattered and torn and weary and worried and wondering about where God is and what God is trying to tell us...not even those days, those feelings, can separate us from God's great and steadfast love.

On those days when it all starts to get to me, I have to remember - or be reminded - to come back to God's great and steadfast love, and the unbreakable connection God established to that love through the waters of baptism. And when I don't even have the words to pray, when I am too broken or bewildered or tired to discern, the Spirit intercedes to God for me, knowing both my heart and the fullness of God's will for me. The Holy Spirit conforms me to the image of Christ, to God's Word. The Spirit helps me pray, helps me to see, God's kingdom breaking into the world around me and into my heart as well.

The Spirit reminds that I am a work in progress. That my choices, although important, do not define me in the same way that God's choosing of me shapes

my life. I am a beloved child of God, and nothing can separate me from God's love.

One of the fun things about Choose Your Own Adventure books is that they are written in the second person. And so, to close, let me switch the pronouns I just used for myself to the second person, for you, for your discernment: On those days when it all gets to you, remember God's great and steadfast love, and the unbreakable connection God established to that love, for you. When you don't even have the words to pray, when you are too broken or bewildered or tired to discern, the Spirit of God intercede for you, knowing your heart and God's will for you. The Holy Spirit will conform you to the image of Christ. The Spirit will help you pray and to see God's kingdom breaking into the world around you and into your heart as well.

The Spirit reminds you that you are a work in progress. Your choices, although important, do not define you in the same way that God's choosing of you shapes your life. You are a beloved child of God, and nothing can separate you from God's love.

***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.**

**With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He 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: Merciful God, your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter us in daily life. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace. (Here a particular world struggle may be named.). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this congregation ask boldly for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being your people in this place and time. 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 Jung, Kiser and Laveck 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 when they are able to do so. Pastor Ryan will continue to provide updates to the congregation as moving details are finalized.

PASTOR RYAN'S WEEKLY UPDATE

Greetings from the Radtkes! Well, after nearly two dozen showings of our house and still no concrete offers, we made the decision to set a date to fly to Virginia whether we have an offer or not. We will be flying out on August 7th and staying with family until we can secure a house in Mechanicsville. We need to get even a little bit settled with Messiah, with schools, and everything else. Please continue to lift us up in prayer that we will have our house in California on track to being sold before we board that plane!

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 \$2932 through July 12th (down from \$2949 on July 5th.)
- We are \$13,335.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (up from \$12,381.11 behind the budget the week prior).

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.

REOPENING SURVEY

A reopening survey from Church Council has recently been sent to those with email addresses from **Survey Monkey** and a hard copy has been sent to all other members. Please take the few minutes that it requires to complete and return. Your feedback will be used to help determine our next steps. A self-addressed stamped envelope has been provided for those members who needed one. We appreciate your time and participation in this important task.

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.

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 sometime in August for this to happen. In the next several 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!

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!

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.

CAROLINE FURNACE UPDATE

Summer Camps have been ordered by the state of Virginia to remain closed for now. However, Outdoor Ministry is so much more than Summer Camp. Here is what we are offering this summer:

- Family Rentals - The Farmhouse, Cabin Village, and Sukkah Village are open for Family Rentals in July and August. 14 days of pre-screening are required for all participants. 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. Regular booking now open.
- 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 reserve your Adventure Weekend cabin.
- Camper families who registered for Summer Camp 2020 will get priority registration for Summer Camp 2021, from October 1 to 15. Payment options

will include 'pay now' and payment plans that can be scheduled for later. Stay tuned for our Summer Camp 2021 schedule to be released by September 15!

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Those who would like to place announcements in our Sunday 'ebulletin' please send them to Donna Shaw at dmslaw70@gmail.com by Wednesday for inclusion.

Prayer List

WE PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Kenneth Deere
Adam Dworak, Sr.
JoAn Firebaugh
Bill Fulop
Elisabeth Gardner
Werner Gardner
Steve Gilnett
Geoffrey Honan
"Doc" Kondaki
Mac McAllister
Roberta McMillen
Nathan, Ruth Schroeder & family
Judy Schwerdtfeger

WE PRAY FOR OUR EXTENDED FAMILY AND NEIGHBORS

Danny Allen, friend of the Whirleys
Dee Schroeder, sister-in-law of Roger.
Tim Schroeder, nephew of Roger.
Elizabeth Zimmerman, Karen Morris' daughter-in-law's aunt
T.J., grandson of the Whirleys.

Pastor Ryan, as he begins his journey with us
Our veterans, their fellow soldiers & their waiting families
All law enforcement, firefighters & first responders
The people and pastor, Rev. Katherine, of All Souls Episcopal & our shared ministry

Hospitals, nursing homes, other health care facilities
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
The World Health Organization Medical researchers and scientists
Schools, workplaces, government institutions and municipal agencies
For all who travel