

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 13, 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: *O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

***THE FIRST LESSON**

Genesis 50:15-21

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

***THE SECOND LESSON**

Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written,

"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

***THE GOSPEL READING**

Matthew 18:21-35

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

SERMON: PASTOR RYAN RADTKE

Pastor Ryan: Before we get started, I'd just like to say how crazy life has been with moving and schools and so many other errands and tasks and vitally urgent matters and unexpected things coming up. And there's no way I'd be surviving it all without my wife and partner, Pastor Liz Radtke. So, since I'm recording this service the day before I get on a plane with my cousin-in-law to go back to California and finish packing and loading our house, and it was the first day of school today, my awesome wife offered to tag team this week's sermon to share the load. So, I'd like to welcome her to the screen: Pastor Liz Radtke! Thanks for doing this with me.

Pastor Liz: No problem. I am glad to help. We're in this together – and we're (motion to camera) in this together and so I thought that it would be quite natural that on a Sunday where our Gospel is talking about living in community and HOW to live in community – that I would help share the load within this community.

Pastor Ryan: So, today's Gospel is kind of part two of a two-part set with last week's lesson, all about forgiveness. Last week, we had Jesus teaching how to handle conflict within the church when a member sins against the whole assembly. I didn't mention this last week, but the Greek "you" in the lesson was actually a "y'all." I said that it was like serving on a jury, where we are tempted to judge those who sin among us, but realizing that we in fact hold each other's lives in our hands. Jesus gave us a simple, flow-chart style set of instructions on how to handle these situations: one, talk to them alone; two, talk to them with two or three others; three, talk to them with the whole church; and four, if they still don't listen, treat them like a tax-collector or a Gentile. In other words, share the good news with them and invite them into your lives, the same way that Jesus treated tax-collectors and Gentiles.

Pastor Liz: This week we zoom in, from the corporate, macro-level of forgiveness when someone sins against the whole group, to the individual, micro-level when someone sins against just you. Personally. Peter is hoping for a similarly simple set of instructions, a nice one-two-three on how to handle this kind of situation. He says, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Seven, you see, was a perfect, holy number. The number of days of creation, the number of days in a week, capped with the gift of sabbath rest. Seven was the number of completeness. Seven's a good number, right Jesus?

And Jesus looks at Peter and all but says, "Bless your heart." He does say, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." Some translations say "seven times seventy times." Either way, it's a huge number with multiple holy, perfect, complete sevens. In effect, Jesus is saying to forgive infinity-squared times. Limitless forgiving.

Pastor Ryan: And that's it. Just forgive. A lot. Jesus tells a parable to teach us why it's important to forgive limitlessly, but there's no handy step-by-step instructions, no easy-to-follow flow-chart like last week. It doesn't say, "if they repent," or "if you achieve reconciliation." It just says keep forgiving. Over and over and over again. All the sevens.

Of course, forgiving this much doesn't mean that you allow abuse or harm to happen. It doesn't mean that there are no consequences for people's actions, no consequences for their sins (you heard about the wicked slave in the parable, right?). It just means that you keep forgiving, just like God forgives us. It's more about your posture of forgiveness than it is about the outcome. Forgiving others is a gift to both the forgiver and the forgiven, sure, but forgiveness is also about you and God.

Pastor Liz: Repeated forgiveness, seventy-seven or seventy times seven times, helps us see others the way God sees us, sees them. In Genesis chapter 1, we hear that God created humans in God's image. All of us bear the image, even the thumbprint of God. Jesus answers Peter not with a flowchart but with a limitless, endless flow of forgiveness for others when they sin against you because, from God's perspective, the forgiveness God bestows on us is limitless.

Pastor Ryan: If it were only up to us, we would see the people who sin against us, who hurt us, only through the lens of that hurt. We'd see them as miserable little trolls, not worth our forgiveness. They hurt us – why should we forgive them?

Pastor Liz: But all our lessons warn us today: don't do that. Don't look at others, judging them, seeing them only through the lens of our hurt, holding their lives in our hands to just squeeze. Joseph tells his scheming brothers, "Am I in the place of God?" Paul warns his readers, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servants of another?" (In other words, God is the Lord here, and we all belong to God, so don't judge God's people – that's God's job alone.) No, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. If folks do things you don't like, don't judge them. Just do your thing and give thanks to God and let them do their thing and give thanks to God. But don't start getting into the judging business. Don't see them through the lenses of your hurt or their sin. See them, instead from God's perspective.

Pastor Ryan: See them as a person. Flawed, to be sure, but made in the image of God and loved by God and redeemed by Christ and gifted by the Spirit. Build relationships with people. Try to understand them, learn about them. You might not agree with them; they might still sin against you or hurt you; there will still be consequences for that; but try to see them from God's perspective, through the image-of-God lens, as wholly and holy as you can, and that will make forgiveness easier. It's not only the golden rule – treat others the way you

would want to be treated – but you treat others the way God treats you: with mercy and grace and forgiveness.

Pastor Liz: We don't want to see people that way. Jesus is telling Peter, and us, to dole out limitless forgiveness to those who sin against us, personally. We're supposed to see the people who have sinned against us as God does. But we don't want to do that. It's much easier, and much more satisfying, to put up our walls and keep them out; or keep them at arm's length; or scapegoat them, and see them only through the lenses of hurt. We can justify that as self-preservation, self-care. Keep those hurtful people away and never think about them again.

But maybe you've heard the expression about keeping a grudge (which is pretty much the same thing as withholding forgiveness): it's like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. You might never be friends with that person again – but Jesus is still telling us to forgive.

Pastor Ryan: And like I said before, Jesus doesn't leave us a recipe for how to do this. In fact, at the end of the parable, the wicked, hypocritical slave is thrown into prison to be tortured until his debt could be paid. However; at the end of the Gospel, we finally see the flowchart: Jesus dies on a cross and is raised to new life, and through that death and resurrection we are saved and forgiven and freed. So: Jesus forgives us through the cross and the empty tomb, and we in turn forgive others, seeing them as best we can as God sees them. There's your flow.

Pastor Liz: The good news here is that God has every right to put up walls and keep us out of the kingdom of heaven. God has every right to keep us at arm's length, to throw us into jail and torture us for our sins. The parable says that the slave owed his master ten thousand talents. That's an astronomically absurd amount of money that no one in that day and age could ever have paid back. It says so right there: it was a debt he could not pay. Well, we can't pay the debt for our sins – it's forever beyond us. God has every right to write us off; but God doesn't. Instead, God sacrifices His beloved Son, a part of Himself, to show us that God isn't putting up walls or scapegoating us or keeping us at arm's length. God forgives our impossible debt and we receive the limitless forgiveness.

Pastor Ryan: I wish we had more of an instruction book for you on this. But really it just comes down to practice. Repetition. Seventy-seven or seventy-times-seven or perfect-number-squared forgivenesses. We won't always do it well. Sometimes we won't forgive at all. But through the relationships we build with each other, with the image-of-God lenses we all have access to, through the sheer repetition of forgiving, we'll start to get the hang of it. We are not God – so don't judge like God; rather, grow in God, and show mercy, no matter the debt.

***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: You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries. Nurture new ministries of education and growth (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom (especially). Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. Lord, in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

A: Teach us to forgive. Remind us that you do not always accuse us. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. 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 Schroeder, Schwerdtfeger and Shaw 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: All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through 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

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

Pastor Ryan is currently in California to finish packing and loading the Radtke household so they can finally finish moving – hooray! So, let's say it again: thank you for all your prayers and support, and keep 'em coming.

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!

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.

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 \$2763 through September 6th (decreasing from \$2791 on August 30th).
- We are \$23,068.11 behind the year-to-date budget needs (increasing from \$21,429.11 behind the budget the week prior).
- Weekly budget need is \$3404.00.

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.

WEBSITE CHANGE

A new tab has been added to our church website entitled "E-Messages". Under this tab you will find links to Bible Study Handouts, weekly Sunday Bulletins, and the monthly Messenger. Hope you find this change helpful when you're looking for these items.

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!

50th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Bill and Betty Fulop celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on September 12. They married in 1970, at First English Lutheran Church in Wheeling, WV. They have been blessed with two children, Heather (and Scott) Palumbo and Will (and Rachael) Fulop, and one grandson, Hunter.