

Sunday, August 16, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

**Welcome:** A warm welcome to all who join us in worship today as God gathers us together in Christ, even when we are apart from one another.

In our reading from Isaiah we hear that God's house will be a house for all people who call out to God, even those who feel like, or are, outcasts.

It is God who welcomes us, and it is God's welcome we share in this lovely and holy house, where no one is any longer an outcast and all are the beloved children of God.

We sing our **Gathering Song:** ELW 858 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

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

**First Reading:** Isaiah 56: 1, 6 - 8

A reading from Isaiah.

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my

covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 63:** As Morning Breaks

**Second Reading:** Romans 11: 1 – 2a, 29 - 32

A reading from Romans.

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

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

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn to Welcome the Gospel:** ELW 751 The Lord is My Song

**Gospel:** Matthew 15: 21 - 28

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my

daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Homily:** Our family’s Schnauzers would have agreed with the Canaanite woman’s statement that even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table. As far as they were concerned, anything that fell from the table was legally theirs. And with three young sons, there was always food falling off the table for the dogs, some of it intentionally.

The words we hear Jesus say in today’s Gospel, that it is not right to give the children’s food to the dogs, is really shocking. It is about the last thing we would expect Jesus to say, and certainly it is not consistent with what Jesus says and does in other places in the Gospels and with his kind treatment of outsiders and foreigners.

This is even more unusual, because today’s Gospel is from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, where foreigners and outsiders, like the Magi in the Epiphany story, often do the will of God way before people who think that only they are the faithful children and true servants of God. Many who read Matthew’s Gospel really struggled with what the writer was saying about the grace and mercy of God being for all people. Stories, like today’s Gospel

story, were really important because they were stories people needed to hear and not the ones they necessarily wanted to hear. I sincerely doubt that the writer of Matthew's Gospel was very popular in some circles. Sometimes we only respect the people who tell us what we want to hear.

It is entirely possible that what we see in today's Gospel is Jesus simply holding up the views of his time to those who heard him speaking that day. His culture was not shy about calling foreigners dogs. In that time and culture, dogs were not held in very great esteem...unlike today, when many dogs eat better than some people and, in some countries, even have health insurance when many people around them do not. In our culture today you might be better off being dog - especially if you are a dog that does not watch television or concern himself with news or politics.

Notice that, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls the woman a Canaanite - the ancient enemy of the Israelites in olden days. This does not happen in other Gospels, where she is called by a more modern and accurate term. Perhaps Jesus, in Matthew's gospel, is willfully showing his followers their deep seated prejudices by giving the kind of answer they expected to hear from a popular leader, in the hopes that they might learn to be more compassionate and gracious.

It worked. It worked very well thanks to the Canaanite woman. I suspect Jesus probably knew it would.

Jesus does those kind of things. Just when we think we have everything figured out, he brings hope from despair, forgiveness from hatred, community out of isolation, and even life from death...turning our little world upside down. He also takes our prejudices and our hatreds and makes us look at them in light his

grace and in light of the Gospel, even when it makes us uncomfortable.

I wonder if Jesus was hoping that one of the disciples might react to his harsh words that he spoke to the Canaanite woman. It appears they just wanted her to leave so they could have some peace and quiet. By praising the woman for her great faith, he probably made them a bit ashamed of the way they behaved that day. At least I hope that is how they felt.

At times, I think he is doing the same thing with us, sending us people who remind us that we need to expand our understanding about who are the children of God and who belongs in the Kingdom of God. Just because something has always been one way, or people have always been seen one way, does not make it proper, just, or right - it only means that we have become accustomed to it and have given it our blessing.

The truth is, that sometimes what we live in and how we live can be a long way from the Kingdom of God...which is why we pray, every day in the Lord's Prayer, that God's Kingdom would come through us and in us, even if it makes us uncomfortable and challenges our most cherished views about people much different from ourselves. When this does happen, the result will be shalom ...peace, mercy, and justice on earth...and more joy in Heaven. May our lives give the angels something to sing about. **Amen.**

**Hymn:** ELW 650 In Christ, There is No East or West

**Prayers of the Faithful:** Gracious God, you gather your people together from many cultures and races and all who call upon your name are heard and welcomed. As you have so graciously welcomed us, may we also greet one another as fellow children of God. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tender-hearted God, you have reminded us that no one stands outside your mercy and grace. Forgive us when we place boundaries where they should not exist, or choose to live by law instead of gospel. May our lives always be a reflection of your grace and the compassion of your beloved son. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of wisdom, grant us discernment as we make choices regarding how we will gather in this time of pandemic. Give us patience and holy wisdom as we begin to prepare to once again gather in this holy place. Grant us your blessing and fill our lives with your peace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for Troy, son of Susan Dupuis, and Ally Linden as they begin their married life together. Bless their marriage and fill them with joy as husband and wife. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are recovering from surgery or are ill: Erin Dupuis, Hilda Klawitter, Sheila Purdy, Joyce Scheuneman, Joyce Schleen, Marlene Schleen, Murray Schutt, Dave Stresman, and all in need of healing. Hold them in your mercy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of gentleness, we pray for all who struggle with mental illness, made more difficult by this time of isolation and anxiety. Help us care for those who are struggling, grant us patient and understanding hearts and minds. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are working on vaccines and treatments during the pandemic and for all who care for those struggling with the virus. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Watch over our loved ones who cannot be with us in these days of physical distancing. We long for the times when we can be together again. Until then, bind our hearts together in the love of Christ, and make us one in him. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God.

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us:

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.**

**Blessing:** May our Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Sending Song:** ELW 836 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **CLWR Kits for Children**

Once again members of the Social Ministry Committee will be gathering items for Canadian Lutheran World Relief's "We Care" Children's Learning and Living Kits. The kits are distributed to children in refugee camps and remote villages around the world. Kits, kit items and donations will be collected, as in past years, in November. Many of the items in the kit are school supplies. Here is the list of kit items for members wishing to take advantage of the "Back to School" sales in late summer:

- 3 lined notebooks
- 10 unsharpened pencils with erasers
- 1 metric ruler (30 cm), 1 pencil sharpener and 1 eraser
- 1 pack of crayons (or pencil crayons)
- 1 small and simple toy (new and not requiring batteries, examples: doll, truck, ball, stuffed toy)
- 1 bar of soap and 1 toothbrush (new and wrapped)
- 1 tube of toothpaste (expiration date no earlier than one year)

\*\*\* Please wait until November to hand in your kit items.

These kits make a real difference in the lives of children. Last year, thanks to the generosity of Zion members, 119 kits were completed. Since 2002 we have shipped 1437 Learning and Living Kits to CLWR. You can read more about the "We Care" program at [www.clwr.org](http://www.clwr.org).

**With Canadian Lutheran World Relief, we are  
"Celebrating God as We Serve Others"**