

# 15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SEPTEMBER 5, 2021



The Woman of Canaan by Harold Copping

## ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL

Website: [www.stjohnfairview.org](http://www.stjohnfairview.org)

Email address: [info@stjohnfairview.com](mailto:info@stjohnfairview.com)

**Secretary – Judy Hartmann** Office 397-6323

Monday and Thursday 9-3

**Pastor Rosemary Captain**

**Organist – Sharon Banjavcic**

**Liturgy by Rev. Thom M. Shuman**

### **\*CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: What good is it if we say we love all people, but give special treatment to a few?

**MANY: God calls us to love others as deeply as we love ourselves, with no strings attached.**

What good is it if we say we want God to show mercy towards us, but are quick to judge others?

**God calls us to forgive our sisters and brothers, to let mercy triumph over judgment.**

What good is it if we say we trust God in every moment, but live guided by our fears?

**We will speak and act as those who trust God to come and live in our fearful hearts.**

### **\*INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

We find it a lot easier to play favorites, rather than treating everyone equally. We find it simpler to classify others as 'them,' instead of discovering what makes them beloved in God's eyes. We cling to fear, when we could grasp hold of God's enduring love. Let us confess together all we have done, and not done, which brings hurt to others, and harm to ourselves. Join me, as we pray together, saying,

### **\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

How glibly we say we trust you, Holy One, and how quickly our fears silence our words. We find

you at the side of the poor, while we cozy up to the rich and famous. You stand behind the counter serving the hungry at the soup kitchen, while we are stocking our freezers and pantries till they overflow. We look down at those whose hands are dirty, but your hand of mercy pulls them into your embracing love.

Forgive us, O Lord, and do good to us when we have trouble doing good for others. Surround us with your love; surround us with your grace; surround us with your peace; surround us with the Spirit of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

*Silence is kept*

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

Be strong, do not fear! God comes, to fill your parched souls with living water, to open your eyes to the grace which is yours.

**God comes, for no other reason than to save us. This is indeed good news. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**\*GLORIA PATRI:**

**Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. Amen.**

**GOSPEL: Mark 7:24-37**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. <sup>25</sup> In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup> The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

<sup>28</sup> But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup> "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." <sup>30</sup> When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup> After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. <sup>32</sup> Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. <sup>33</sup> Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

<sup>34</sup> Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, “*Ephphatha*,” which means, “Open up.” <sup>35</sup> At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. <sup>37</sup> People were overcome with wonder, saying, “He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can’t speak.”

This is the Word of God. It is true and can be trusted.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE:** “Who do you say that I am?” It’s a much harder question than we think it is, and it’s already hard enough. As we read from the New Testament every Sunday, we discover that we cannot see a uniform portrait of Christ.

Not only do we have four very different Gospels, each remarkably unique in their individual understandings of the meaning of Jesus’ ministry, there are twenty-three additional books that articulate varying views of Jesus.

Even the thirteen letters attributed to Paul adapt the function and significance of Jesus Christ depending on the circumstances that need to be

addressed in each congregation. In our scripture text this morning, Jesus asks his disciples this question: “and you, who do *you* say that I am?”

Peter, so often the first to speak, responds, “you are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). Of course, we who know the whole story know that Peter has given the right answer. Yet the answer Peter gives is not actually very logical. The title “Messiah” in Hebrew or “Christ” in Greek was associated in Jewish tradition with an anointed king, a royal figure from the line of David expected to come and free Israel from their Gentile oppressors, purify the people, and restore Israel’s independence and glory. Nothing in Jesus’ career up to now has given any indication of claims to royalty or political ambitions.

So far Jesus has made no claim to be the Messiah, and he certainly has shown no sign of taking on the Romans. Perhaps Peter hopes that when they go to Jerusalem, Jesus will finally take on this Messianic role. Perhaps that is why Jesus tells his disciples to tell no one about him, because he knows that they are still so very far from understanding what he is all about.

As soon as Jesus begins to speak of what is to come in his career as Messiah -- rejection, suffering, and death -- Peter is quick to try to set him straight. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. We can

imagine him saying, “no, no, Jesus, this is not the way it is supposed to go. The Messiah is supposed to conquer the Romans, not get killed by them. **What good is a dead Messiah?**”

Peter's response is understandable in light of Jewish Messianic expectations, which are perhaps not so very different from what we want in a Savior. What do we want in a Savior? Have you ever really thought about that? Just as Jesus is asking the disciples, “who do you say that I am?” He is also asking us.

Too often in popular evangelism, Jesus is presented in this way -- as a kind of superhero who solves every problem for us, as a guarantor of prosperity and success. Nothing could be further from what Jesus has in mind. Jesus' response to Peter is harsh: “get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mark 8:33).

This is one of those moments in scripture that highlights the vast distance between us and God. Though Jesus is God with us, we cannot tame him or make him over into our image.

We would like a savior who is a winner, and one who makes us winners, but Jesus insists on identifying with the lowliest of losers. **He will allow** himself to be judged and condemned as a

blasphemer by Jewish religious leaders. **He will allow** himself to be mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the romans. And that's not all. Jesus actually expects his disciples to follow him on this path of suffering and death.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:34-35).

Here I think it is important to be clear about what Jesus means by taking up the cross. He is not talking about the suffering that is simply part of life in a broken world -- everything from annoying neighbors to serious illness to natural disasters. Neither is he telling us to seek out suffering or martyrdom. Jesus himself did not seek it, but he foresaw that it would be the inevitable outcome of his mission. Jesus speaks of losing our lives ***for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel.***

Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences might be. It means putting Jesus' priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security. It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them for others -- using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others

might experience god's love made known in Jesus Christ.

How can we possibly do this? Our instinct for self-preservation fights it at every step. In this sense we are no different from the first disciples. They certainly tried to save their lives. Though Jesus tried to prepare them for what was to come in Jerusalem, they all deserted him. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with silent personal prayer  
We praise you, God of Israel, God of the church universal. You made the heavens and the earth, the sparrow and the gull, the whale and the minnow. You care for people, the hungry and the oppressed. You restore sight and help the stooped to stand tall. You give new heart to the bereaved and hopeless. Our hopes are in you and you will not disappoint us at the last. We praise you, Creator, Christ, Comforter. Today we lift up all those on our prayer list and all those we hold dear in our hearts. We pray for all God's people around the world; the oppressed, the frightened, the hungry, the thirsty. May we be the answer to their prayers in any way we can. In your Son's Holy name, we pray all these things. Amen.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your 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 debts as, we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

**PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769**

**Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God;  
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** For gifts received.

May we who are rich with your blessings, share them in common with those who have so little. May our gifts be used to sow justice, to feed the hungry, and to bring relief to those afflicted in so many ways. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**HOLY COMMUNION:**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

My beloved sisters and brothers,  
may the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

My beloved brothers and sisters, lift up your hearts.

**Our hearts are offered to our God.**

My beloved sisters and brothers, let us give thanks to

the Lord our God.

**Thanksgiving is in our hearts, and praise is on our lips.**

Our hearts do handsprings, and our joy echoes off the mountains, Creator of all: rich and poor, man and woman, child and grandparent, gnat and galaxy. Created in your image, we ridicule others who look different from us; our lungs filled with the Spirit's breath, we laugh at those who are not as good as we imagine we are. But even when we turn our backs on you, your love is steadfast and your grace is abundant.

And so, with all your people, those on earth and those around your throne, those beside us in this moment and those with you throughout eternity, we proclaim everlasting praise to you:

**Holy, holy, holy, God who surrounds creation with your grace! Heaven and earth sing to the One who made them all. Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who shares bread with the poor. Hosanna in the highest!**

Holy are you, and blessed is Jesus, your Son, our Brother, our Savior. Jesus has done everything well: eating and drinking with sinners, he taught us that there is a place at the Table for each and every one of us; responding to the cries of the poor, he shows us we are all equal in God's heart; clearing the eyes of the blind and opening the ears of the deaf, inviting children to sit on his lap and conversing with the outsiders of his day, he models the radical inclusiveness of your kingdom.

As we remember all you did in and through him - his words, his touch, his laughter, his silence, his pain, his loneliness, his death, his resurrection - we offer ourselves in trust and hope, in service and sacrifice, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died, to sow life;  
Christ has risen, to sow grace;  
Christ will return, to sow justice for all.**

May the Spirit of the Risen Lord  
be poured out on us in this place,  
and on the gifts of the bread and the cup that has  
been previously blessed.

As we take the broken loaf, we feast,  
not on the crumbs which fall from the Table,  
but on the grace which makes us whole;  
We take the cup on the hope which makes us one;  
on the love which calls us to serve:  
to welcome the immigrants to our neighborhood,  
to teach the little child to read,  
to affirm the awkward adolescent,  
to share our bread and all we have  
with those in need, until that day when Christ returns  
and all shall feast at his banquet in heaven.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,  
all honor and glory are yours,  
Great God, our hope, our trust, our redemption,  
now and forever. Amen.

#### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS:**

This is the bread of life, given for you. Take and eat.

This is the cup of the new covenant in the life of  
Jesus. Take and drink.

#### **\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Bountiful God, we give you thanks that you have  
refreshed us at your table by granting us the  
presence of Christ. Strength our faith, increase our  
love for one another, and send us forth into the  
world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of  
the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### **\*RESPONSIVE BLESSING AND SENDING:**

God sends us forth to love all people, no strings  
attached.

**We will share grace and hope with everyone.**

Jesus sends us forth to forgive our sisters and  
brothers.

**We will offer mercy, not judgment, to those around  
us.**

The Spirit sends us forth to trust God in every  
moment.

**We will live in faith, not in fear, sharing our hearts  
with all we meet. Amen.**

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Joe  
Knapp, Jim Garrett, Agnes Doctolero, Julie Walker,  
David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz, Warren Neff,  
Jack Harris, Wayne Huff, Jackie Canterbury, Doris  
Moody, Pastor Rosemary Captain.