

AUGUST 16, 2026
12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



St. John United Church of Christ

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(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus", Converse,
arr. Eithun

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Our Churches Wider Mission

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: This is a Sabbath dedicated to our God.

Let this gathering place be a home for all people.

MANY: **May God be gracious to us and bless us.**

May God's face shine over all the earth's people.

ONE: Let all the people praise the God of all nations.

Let us give thanks and enjoy the blessings God gives.

MANY: **May God grant us understanding and courage.**

May faith grow beyond our doubts.

ONE: The earth has yielded its blessing.

Let all the ends of the earth revere our Creator.

MANY: **God brings us together in unity of purpose.**

May our circle grow as we welcome newcomers.

***INVOCATION:**

How Good and pleasant it is, O God, when kindred live together in unity. Draw us now into the community you intend for all your people. Help us to listen and understand, both your word for us and our sharing with one another. Keep us from being misled by popular

acclaim and the wisdom of the marketplace. May we not be unobservant guides to one another but rather be fully open to your gifts and obedient to your call. Come to us now with healing and blessing. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 395**

“In Christ There is No East or West”

***CALL TO CONFESSION:**

Both our speech and our actions call into question our faithfulness to God. In times of stress, we have made statements that we regret. Jealousy and anger have led to deceit, betrayal, and broken relationships. Our best intentions sometimes go astray. Rather than being distressed with ourselves, we bring the wounds of our common life to this time of confession, that we may receive God’s healing.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

Forgive us, O God, for the sin we recognize in ourselves and the wounds we do not see. Show us how we have hurt one another and grant us courage to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Reveal to us our disobedience to you and keep us from leading others into our sin. We seek your mercy for the times we have willfully offended. Help us to put aside all actions and

comments that defile. Cleanse us for new life in Christ. Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

God is merciful toward us and listens to our honest prayers. Our thoughts and deeds are fully known to God, who is eager to forgive and to lead us to new understandings. When we earnestly seek God’s help, we are set free to discover new opportunities. Even in the worse of circumstances, God works with us to bring some good and to preserve life. May God be praised!

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph reveals his identity

45 Joseph could no longer control himself in front of all his attendants, so he declared, “Everyone, leave now!” So no one stayed with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians and Pharaoh’s household heard him. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I’m Joseph! Is my father really still alive?” His

brothers couldn't respond because they were terrified before him.

⁴ Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me," and they moved closer. He said, "I'm your brother Joseph! The one you sold to Egypt." ⁵ Now, don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives. ⁶ We've already had two years of famine in the land, and there are five years left without planting or harvesting. ⁷ God sent me before you to make sure you'd survive^[a] and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. ⁸ You didn't send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt.

⁹ "Hurry! Go back to your father. Tell him this is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me master of all of Egypt. Come down to me. Don't delay.' ¹⁰ You may live in the land of Goshen, so you will be near me, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and everyone with you. ¹¹ I will support you there, so you, your household, and everyone with you won't starve, since the famine will still last five years.' ¹² You and my brother Benjamin have seen with your own eyes that I'm speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about my power in Egypt and about everything you've seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and

Benjamin wept on his shoulder. ¹⁵ He kissed all of his brothers and wept, embracing them. After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 133 Page 712

EPISTLE: Romans 11:1-2a 29-32

Israel and God's faithfulness

¹¹ So I ask you, has God rejected his people? Absolutely not! I'm an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God hasn't rejected his people, whom he knew in advance. Or don't you know what the scripture says in the case of Elijah, when he pleads with God against Israel?

²⁹ God's gifts and calling can't be taken back. ³⁰ Once you were disobedient to God, but now you have mercy because they were disobedient. ³¹ In the same way, they have also been disobedient because of the mercy that you received, so now they can receive mercy too. ³² God has locked up all people in disobedience, in order to have mercy on all of them.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 15:10-20**

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd near and said to them, "Listen and understand. ¹¹ It's not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God's sight. It's what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person."

¹² Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you just said?”

¹³ Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be pulled up. ¹⁴ Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. But if a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch.”

¹⁵ Then Peter spoke up, “Explain this riddle to us.”

¹⁶ Jesus said, “Don’t you understand yet? ¹⁷ Don’t you know that everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸ But what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight. ¹⁹ Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults. ²⁰ These contaminate a person in God’s sight. But eating without washing hands doesn’t contaminate in God’s sight.”

Canaanite woman

²¹ From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from those territories came out and shouted, “Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.” ²³ But he didn’t respond to her at all. His disciples came and urged him, “Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us.”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.”

²⁵ But she knelt before him and said, “Lord, help me.”

²⁶ He replied, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and toss it to dogs.”

²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish.” And right then her daughter was healed.

MESSAGE: “Traditions, good and bad”

Many, if not most, of you have seen at the movies or on stage, perhaps at the MUNY, the musical call “Fiddler on the Roof”. It’s a very popular production. The story is all about traditions. The small Jewish village in Russia in 1905 has been there for many years and has many, many, traditions, not necessarily tied to their religious beliefs. What the people thought were unbreakable rules, customs, and traditions are being challenged and not just from the Russian regime. Sometimes the challenge comes right within the family. The question is was that particular written -in- stone tradition any good? Is it worth keeping?

Most families have some traditions. What time do you eat supper. When do you open Christmas gifts? And

church's have traditions. Last Sunday we heard about traditions of this church 75 years ago. Pastor Tim Darmour-Paul told us what it was like when he was a boy, growing up in the parsonage. I'm sure there were many traditions back then. How many do we still honor? I applaud this church. For the 9 years I've been here, I have never once heard, "but we've never done it that way." Bravo to you.

We can't help but think of those who faithfully show up online, (if our services were online) or in our sanctuaries to worship together. Rapid changes in our world have brought under scrutiny rich traditions and practices that have guided not only corporate worship but also the ways of keeping faith in the arena of everyday life.

Those same traditions have shaped one's perception of faithful practice but also one's views of the "other." Far too often our traditions train us to treat the "other" with fear and to regard "them" as "dirty" and "less than" who "we" are. Fearful tradition-keepers in any age are concerned that interaction with the "other" will pollute and confuse their understanding of who they are.

Ironically, tradition keeping is also vulnerable to another attitude. One can judge that there is nothing of value in one's tradition and, like some useless commodity, traditions can be thoughtlessly discarded.

Both extreme attitudes can restrict faithful obedience to God. On the one hand a traditional practice can become petrified or paralyzed, robbing the tradition-keeper of the vitality of a living faith. On the other hand, impulsively discarding (or even forgetting) a tradition can rob one of the nurturing resources of collective wisdom. In those cases, what is needed is a trustworthy, authoritative interpreter to decide which traditions are helpful and which are hurtful.

Matthew, the author of this gospel, presents Jesus as such a one, an interpreter. Jesus for Matthew is a "new Moses" who has come "not to abolish the Law or the prophets but to fulfill".

What does fulfillment of Torah look like for the Jewish people.? One moment of the fulfillment happens in Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman. There is nothing new in it at first. Jesus seems to be going by an old script for such interactions.

To our ears, what follows is appalling but to the faithful in Matthew's community, Jesus reacts to the woman's request as they would expect of a rabbi in those days. She represents Israel's notorious ancient foe – the Canaanites!

Traditional religious practices and prejudices, designed to guide Israel's relationship with "outsiders" and

“enemies”, would support Jesus’ harsh dismissal of her desperate concern for her daughter. First, he gives her the silent treatment. Then the disciples get into the act: “tell her to lower her voice!” “She’s being annoying!” Then Jesus says (in words that seem to shore up his rabbinic credentials) “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.

It only gets worse! When she comes kneeling before him, Jesus insults her. She looks to him like a dog begging for crumbs under the table! It is ritualized humiliation.

This scene is admittedly a hard one to preach. One may want to get Jesus off the hook and preserve the generic “good guy” Jesus that drifts through tradition, even though this tradition is breaking open right before our eyes.

This is who Matthew saw Jesus as being. He has been sent to the house of Israel to be the authoritative interpreter of tradition. The question is this: is Jesus, as the child of and bearer of traditional thought methods, capable of being the “new Moses” in his encounter with the “other”?

The tension in the encounter is released with a simple statement of faith. This Canaanite woman has named Jesus as “Lord” and “Son of David”, but when she

declares her utter dependence on God’s grace, Jesus’ tradition-shaped heart breaks open.

This woman is persistent. She isn’t frightened away by insults. She has faith Jesus can help her daughter. “Woman, great is your faith!” he declares.

This is what faith and fulfillment look like, Matthew seems to tell us. It recognizes Jesus as God’s agent through whom God makes salvation and justice happen. It also recognizes that Jesus is of Israel, and represents a fulfillment of an ancient promise given to the prophet Isaiah for Israel. THAT PROMISE IN ISAIAH 42:6 STATES “I chose you to bring justice, and am here at your side. I selected you and sent you to bring light and my promise of hope to the nations.”

It is such hope that has drawn this Canaanite woman to Jesus with her plea, and in so doing she transgresses boundaries imposed by religious tradition, practice, and prejudice.

Faithful Israel was and continues to be a bearer of God’s promise to all nations. We can look to this woman as an ancestor in faith: she calls upon God’s agents - Israel, Jesus, the church - to act as God’s agents to INTERPRET some traditions that need to be changed. Some

traditions are too hard to keep – they are as difficult as a fiddler on a roof .

Amen

HYMN: 23 “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

PASTORAL PRAYER:

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 775

And God will raise you up on eagle’s wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
And hold you in the palm of God’s hand.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

OFFERTORY: "Change My Heart, O God",
Espinosa, arr. Nielson

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

As you have blessed us, O God, we are eager to share.
May we offer more than crumbs from your table. May

none be sent away from the blessings you intend for all. We want our offerings to preserve and extend life to your children, here in this place and wherever our influence can reach. What is in the offering plates is only a part of what we dedicate ourselves to do and be that your reign of unity and peace may come. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: 397

“Thank Our God for Sisters, Brothers”

COMMISSION AND BLESSING:

ONE: God’s call to service goes with you from this place.
We cannot escape from God’s expectations.

MANY: We intend to be faithful to God’s call. We want to make sure no one is excluded.

ONE: God’s bounty is meant for all to share. Because we have received so much, we have much to give.

MANY: In giving, we also receive so much more. We learn from those we seek to benefit.

ONE: May no evil intent enter hearts cleansed by God.
May the Spirit help us live in unity.

MANY: We have received God’s abundant mercy. We depart, intent on showing mercy to all.

Amen. **Amen.**

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571

O God of Love, O God of Peace

Make wars throughout the world to cease.

The wrath of human wrong restrain;

Give peace, O God, give peace again!

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot",

American spiritual, arr. Eithun

PRAYER LIST: Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Amber Forrester, Wayne Huss, our Beloved Country.