

Minnesota Valley Church

Date: Sunday, January 22, 2023

Church Year Date: 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

THEME: God is calling us to a life of love, humility, kindness and harmony.

Prelude: Carol Gustafson

Singers: Osthus who may need to be gone then Fugleberg

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Psalm 110:1-4 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." 2 The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. 3 Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. 4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

Hymn #171 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

Confession of Sin: *I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God; He bears them all and frees us, From the accursed load. I bring my guilt to Jesus, To wash my crimson stains, White in His blood most precious, 'Till not a spot remains. Amen*

Children's Sermon:

Reader: Jacob O'Flanagan

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *2 Kings 5:1-15a Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. 2 Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my*

master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." 4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" 8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. 13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, "Wash and be cleansed!" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. 15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 8:1-13 When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately*

he was cured of his leprosy. 4 Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: Apostles' Creed- *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen*

Gloria Patri: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Announcements and Prayer Concerns

PRAISE AND WORSHIP:

SERMON: RADICAL LIVING, Romans 12:16-21 Pastor Tom Olson *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

RADICAL: The Christian faith is “radical” in a certain way. We believe in concepts that are radical: “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and eternal life.” We believe in doing good to those who spitefully abuse us, we don’t believe in holding grudges, we believe in helping those in need. God demonstrates his radical way of living through His people with a life of lavish love.

SEARCHING: Radical Living a life of love is the testimony that our world is searching for. We are the only Bible that most people will ever read and here in Romans 12 we have some great instructions about RADICAL LIVING. Let’s talk about a few of the ideas:

I. FOUNDATION: LIVE IN HARMONY & HUMILITY

Romans 12:16 Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

HUMILITY: A foundation stone of the beautiful Christian life is HUMILITY. The Apostle says “***do not be proud.***” There are many things that can make us proud: our family name, our education, our abilities, our looks, our finances, our social status and so much more. Age does a good job of humbling us. Have you ever seen photos of good-looking actors and actresses when they get old. With the help of the California sun and chemical

abuse and natural deterioration, some of them get pretty homely by the time they are 60 years old. Money can disappear too, diseases can totally knock us down, mental deterioration can make a genius into a child. Toward the end of his life, my brilliant teacher father, with Alzheimer's, was teaching classes of stuffed animals and trying to make the stuffed bunny rabbit behave. That is humbling.

FALL: The prouder we are, the harder we fall. When ordinary laborers end up in a nursing home, they do quite well. They never have thought of themselves as something special. But when people who we treat as important end up by themselves in a wheelchair, in a lonely room for hours on end, they often have a hard time of it. When my mother-in-law was in a nursing home, I noticed two common laborers in the meeting room talking and waiting for us to come and sing hymns and visit with them. But time after time I walked by the room of a well-known expert in a certain field that had travelled the world to important meetings. He just sat there and stared blankly. It was really hard for him to be humbled by age and weakness.

ASSOCIATIONS: That is why the Apostle tells us here to be willing to associate with people of low position. Most of the big shots I have known in life dump you, once they are done with you, and you don't hear from them again. But I have befriended some pretty ordinary folks in my life as a rural pastor and many of them are lifelong friends who never turn their back on me. They greet me with great joy when we see each other.

WARNING: Perhaps that is why the Bible warns us to be very wary about dining with the wealthy and powerful in **Proverbs 23:1&3** *“When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you...3 Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is DECEPTIVE.”* It is food with an agenda. That is quite a contrast to eating at grandma's house, that is food served with love. I cherish my memories of eating at grandma's more than any great banquet I have attended.

FRIENDS: You will find satisfying delight if you put away your pride and learn to love to associate with people of the low social class. They make the best friends you could ever want to have.

TRACTORS: That is what I love about my antique tractor hobby. Most of the people have grease under their finger nails and they are some of the best folks you could want to know. On Monday a man from the Rice Lake, WI antique tractor club who repairs milk lines in dairy barns pulled into our Wisconsin place because he saw our car there. He wanted to check up on me because he had heard I had some health issues. These are good people to know. LIVE IN HARMONY AND HUMILITY with ordinary people. SECONDLY, RADICAL...

II. DAILY LIVING: CULTIVATE PEACE WITH EVERYBODY

Romans 12:17&18 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

GOAL: We can try, to the best of our ability, to CULTIVATE PEACE with everyone.

MEAN: Some people are just mean and hurtful. When we are attacked, the Apostle tells us to repay evil with good. We cannot always stay away from their poison but we can prevent that poison from infecting our hearts.

WATCHING: Why not give them what they deserve? The Apostle tells us to *“be careful to do what is right”* because people are watching us.

CAVEAT: Notice that the Apostle Paul is practical when he says, that we should *“live at peace with everyone”* and he qualifies the statement with *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you...”* Sometimes it is not possible...because of substance abuse, because

of mental deterioration, because of anger, temper and violence in some folk's nature. What do we do then?

AVOID: The Apostle Paul tells us what to do in that case as well. **2 Timothy 4:14-15** *“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.”* Sometimes peace comes through avoiding viscous people. There are a few people I have avoided over the years. I even avoid a couple pastors who have this sarcastic sense of humor that they use to put people in their place. I don't enjoy getting insulted, so I avoid them. Only God can deal with them. There are even times when some have to let a marital partner go because they will not live with you peacefully: **1 Corinthians 7:15** *“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; GOD HAS CALLED US TO LIVE IN PEACE.”*

TRY: We try our best to CULTIVATE PEACE WITH ALL PEOPLE. I told you about the difficult school mate I sent a Christmas letter to who called me to rant about my faith because the letter said “Merry Christmas,” and that upset him because he feels my faith is stupid. He is a miserable person and I let him tear me down long enough to give my testimony of faith to him. But I will not likely answer his phone calls for another year because it is too painful to have him attack me with an angry tirade. We try...THAT IS ALL WE CAN DO. The final RADICAL LIVING PRINCIPLE IS RADICAL...

III. WINNING: CONQUER THEM WITH ACTS OF KINDNESS

Romans 12:19-21 *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In*

doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

JESUS: Jesus tells us what to do to those who abuse us. **Matthew 5:44&45** *“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”* Jesus is saying that this is how people will know that we are children of God, part of the radical kingdom of love.

MUSLIM: There was a Muslim executioner who became a Christian because he saw the way those he killed died and knew he could not die in peace like a Christian.

MURDER: This also is true: a woman went to the prison to look at the man who murdered her son in order to revive her hate for him. Instead, he was a changed man and he showed great remorse for what he had done and he told her the sad tale of his terrible life that led him up to the dreadful day. She felt pity for him and actually said that the way he could make up for murdering her son was to take his place and let her adopt him. The two of them formed a ministry to overcome the hurt of heinous crimes and reconcile people to one another.

PRAY: The best thing you can do for someone you want to hate is to pray for them. Then do good things for them, even anonymously. It is almost impossible to hate those who you pray for and are kind to. And often that undeserved kindness will win their heart and transform their lives as well. One man who had hurt me deeply became my friend only after I started to pray for blessing in his life. He never apologized, I let it go...and I am glad I did because he died from COVID.

DEAD: Maybe, for the sake of your own soul, you need to even go to the grave of person who has hurt you deeply and say, out loud, “I forgive you.” And go a step further and leave a nice flower there too. Maybe we need to do something nice for someone who is alive, who has hurt us. They have souls too that need to find an

entry point for faith. LOVE IS THE KEY THAT OPENS THE DOOR TO EVANGELISM. CONQUER DIFFICULT PEOPLE WITH KINDNESS, CULTIVATE PEACE AND LIVE WITH HUMILITY.

PROFESSOR: I watched a very well-produced video of a 97-year-old philosophy professor from Berkley, California reflect on life and death. It was thought provoking. He had no faith in God, his pride was in the books he wrote, he didn't talk about his daughter or grandchildren at all, he believed he would soon die and then there would be nothingness and his conclusion was this: LIFE IS POINTLESS AND MEANINGLESS. That is the end of a left-wing Berkely radical atheist.

DEPARTURE: But Christians are even more radical when we die. We REJOICE in the gift of life. We are SURROUNDED by our family that we love. We REMEMBER all the good times we had together. We are SURE that the moment we die we will be in heaven with other loved ones who believe. We FEEL that life was very meaningful as we lived for love and the glory of God. We believe that death is the door to everlasting life because of the innocent blood of Jesus shed on the cross to atone for our sins.

RADICAL: What is radical Christian living? It is to live a life of faith, hope and love and to die with a song on our hearts and the expectation of "the best it yet to come." This is the testimony that people who are not prepared to die need to see and hear. I urge you all to go out and do some "RADICAL LIVING" as the Holy Spirit leads you. Amen

Hymn: To be chosen by Carol
Lord's Prayer
Benediction
Closing Song: Chosen by Carol

Postlude: Carol Gustafson