

SERVICE INFORMATION: May 11, 2025

Mother's Day

Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: from Psalm 23

PASTOR: The LORD is my shepherd

ALL: I shall not want.

PASTOR: He makes me lie down in green pastures,

ALL: he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

HYMN #561 "When Peace Like a River"

CONFESSION OF SIN: *Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and ask You for Christ's sake, grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

PRAYER

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE:

Reader: Toby Johnson

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: *Revelation 7:9-17 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to*

our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" 13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-who are they, and where did they come from?" 14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

GOSPEL LESSON: *John 10:22-33 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one." 31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

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

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

CONFESSION OF FAITH: 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: *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 FOR OFFERING

PRAISE SONGS: songs chosen by Luke Johnson

SERMON TITLE: “LIFE TOGETHER”

Acts 20:17-38; Pastor Tom Olson; May 11, 2025

Beloved, Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

BONHOEFFER: Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was well known for being put to death for his part in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. But he was actually involved in many interesting activities as a Pastor in 1930's Germany. Bonhoeffer attended a Black church while studying in New York. This African American church was like a family, the music was passionate and from the heart. He wanted to bring that warm spirit back to Germany.

SEMINARY: When he went back to Germany, he started an alternative theological seminary. It was a warm community on a remote estate in rural northern Germany. Bonhoeffer patterned it after the Black church in New York. His theme verse was ***Psalm 133:1 “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.”*** He wrote about it in his book **“Life Together.”**

FAMILY: I see such parallels between his seminary, the New Testament church in Jerusalem and family life. His book title, “Life Together” is perfect for Mother's Day, when we focus on the family. Let's look at the early church in the book of Acts and apply Acts 20 to our own families, our “Life Together.”

I. OUR ACTIONS: HUMILITY, TEARS AND SEVERE TESTS

Acts 20:17-19 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.

PRIORITY: To our wives and mothers, the happiness of the home is their priority. Much of home life is the same as Paul's ministry in Ephesus. He said life together is marked by 1) HUMILITY; 2) TEARS and 3: Severe TESTS.

HUMILITY: Much of what we do to raise a family is done in humility: washing clothes, cooking meals, cleaning house, making money to pay the bills and educating our children. It takes humble service to have a good home life.

TEARS: Then there are the tears, from disappointments and unfulfilled expectations. Mom sheds many tears over the years.

SEVERE TESTS: The cost of marriage and family is severe tests. There is illness, sick babies, car accidents, drug addictions, marital stress, loved ones dying, financial reversals and job loss, depression, loneliness, anxiety and fears. The Apostle Paul was one of the most fruitful missionaries in church history, but listen to what the honor cost him, I wonder how many people would go into the Christian ministry if this was the job description:

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

THEOLOGY...not exactly health, wealth and prosperity theology! **Any time we do an important work for the Lord, there is a cost.** We become Satan's enemy. Raising a godly family puts a big target right on mom's back and we need to keep our young mothers and fathers in prayer. LIFE TOGETHER ALSO INCLUDES...

II. OUR ACTIVITIES: TEACH, VISIT AND ADMONISH

Acts 20:20-27 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. 22 "And now, compelled by the

Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. 25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

The ministry of the Apostle Paul is very descriptive of the activities of raising a godly family. Notice here that he focused on three main things: TEACHING, VISITING AND ADMONISHING.

TEACHING: The day-by-day teaching of children in the home is so very important. My dad taught school for so many years that he had his students' children and perhaps even a couple grandchildren of former students in his classes. He once said that it was very common for the children of former students would act the same way their parents did and get about the same grades. **What we teach in the home by our actions and attitudes is the primary factor that influences our children.** It is very important for us, even as grandparents, to be considering what we want to teach our offspring and how to do it. My grandparents taught me a lot through life stories and helpful saying, like "The early bird gets the worm." Maybe that is why I get up very early most days!

VISITING: Another important part of home life is where we visit. Paul tried very hard, even with primitive forms of transportation, to visit the churches he started. I was influenced by visiting with my parents when I was young. We regularly went to see our elderly relatives. It was a priority to my mom to do that. Most Sundays included a meal at one of our grandparents' homes. These visits affected my life. Vacations with a purpose can also be very educational. I know one homeschool family that visited the

birthplace or burial place of many presidents of the United States. They would study that president and US history of that era in preparation for that visit.

ADMONISHING: The Apostle also admonished his churches. To admonish means to warn or reprimand. We often are so bent on being liked that we are afraid to admonish people who are going down a dangerous path.

NEIGHBOR: My neighbor boy is a teen-ager and his dad died last year. He doesn't have a dad to "get after him" like he used to. I hesitate to say anything because I don't have a right, but I know the boy needs guidance. On Friday, the boy had a power washer and was going to clean off his late dad's beautiful and expensive speed boat in preparation to take it out on Lake Marion on Saturday. He could not get the pressure washer to spray so he asked if I could help him. I noticed that the tiny nozzle was plugged so I went and got a piece of stiff violin string that I keep in my tool box and I cleared out the blockage. I have personally damaged many things by using a power washer too close to surfaces so I just had to remind him to not get too close to the boat as he washed it for fear it would tear off lettering, permits, paint or make an ugly mark.

BOATING: Then I had a little talk with him about how many people would be out on Lake Marion and how important it is to be careful because my good friend had a son killed boating on a busy lake. I just had to admonish this fatherless boy. I could not just let it go. The boy listened very politely and promised me to be careful. I actually think he likes it when I talk to him about those things. Admonishing is an important part of family life. It is actually an expression of love. And finally, "LIFE TOGETHER" has duties...

III. OUR DUTY: PROTECT, PROVIDE AND EMBRACE

Acts 20:28-38 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of

the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" 36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

PROTECT: The first thing that Paul mentions here is that he did everything he could to protect the congregation from error. He knew that false teachers would come and distort the truth for personal gain. I listened to a two-hour interview with the nephew of a famous TV preacher named Benny Hinn. This nephew, who once worked for him and saw everything, exposed his uncle's exploitation of people in order to get their money and live a lavish lifestyle which included things like hotel rooms for \$20,000 per night! He promised the givers supernatural prosperity if they would give large offerings to him.

MOMS: I am encouraged to see many "bull dog moms" standing up to school boards that are allowing the sexualized school curriculums into their schools and bringing unprecedented homosexuality and gender confusion to our children right down to kindergarten level. These moms are speaking up to protect children.

PROVIDE: The Apostle Paul says here that he did everything to provide for himself and for others. He worked hard in order to make it possible to get the gospel to places with limited resources. I have a friend who works as a surveyor all week long so that he has the money to volunteer as a pastor of a small church.

WORK: All the work that parents do, often at jobs they may not like very well...all that work is sacred because it is for the provision of the family. I grew up in a factory town. Men worked on hot, dirty and dangerous jobs they didn't like in order to support their families. Women gardened, preserved vegetables, sewed clothing and did what they could to make the dollars stretch. I know that my mom went without many things she may have liked to have in order to provide for her four children.

EMBRACE: The final thing I seen in this text from Acts 20 is something a little tough for a stoic Norwegian like I am. Paul left that place, knowing that it was the last time he would see them, and he EMBRACED them. They hugged. There was a bond of love between the Apostle and the little congregation of believers.

APPLE: When Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Computers and an extra-ordinarily rich man was dying at a fairly young age he finally realized that he had it all wrong. Life is not about money or power or fame. In his words he said he missed that fact of how important it is to "have friends." He saw, too late, that LIFE TOGETHER is the important thing...not money, not possessions, not fame.

SON: Travis Hensersky and I had supper together at Lakeville Perkins on Thursday evening. I have kind of adopted him as a son since his dad died. He calls me "Father." When we depart, he gives me a big hug...EMBRACING.

LARRY: Yesterday I spent some time with Larry and Caryll Newland at the Benedictine home in Northfield. It was a precious, yet painful, moment as Larry watches Caryll slip closer and closer

to her last breath. Larry is not a man of many words but I have gotten closer to him through this whole process, including his own recent stroke. As I was leaving, I stretched out my hand to shake his but he put his arm around me and just pulled my head close to his chest and held on to me at the point of tears. We often forget how much our lonely elders need someone to embrace them.

REMINDER: On this Mother's Day we are reminded by the Word of God that LIFE TOGETHER is important. The Apostle Paul teaches us here what a good LIFE TOGETHER is really about: HUMILITY, TEARS, TESTING, TEACHING, VISITING, ADMONISHING, PROTECTING, PROVIDING AND EMBRACING... If you have no family, you have the church, the family of God where you can love and be loved.

APPEAL: Mother's Day is a good day to rededicate our lives to living LIFE TOGETHER well. Jesus adopts us into His family by grace and it is a worldwide forever family. LIFE TOGETHER is so important. Perhaps we should respond by finding someone this week that needs a big hug and a good conversation. It is these little simple things that make our lives together rich. *Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen*

HYMN #571 "He Hideth My Soul"

LORD'S PRAYER: *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 that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION & DOXOLOGY: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen. A-men. A---men.*

POSTLUDE: Rebekah Olson