

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67; Romans 11:1-2a; 29-32; **Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28**

Core: True faith is having hope in the midst of a hopeless situation.

Law: Tradition, customs, and doctrines determine what is right for the faithful.

Gospel: God is open to change and tenacious, hope-filled faith.

Hello there. My name is Jim Rowe and I am the interim pastor for Lutheran Campus Ministry in Denton. On behalf of Lutheran Campus Ministry in Denton and the entire Lutheran Campus Ministry Network, thank you! Lutheran Campus Ministry in the North Texas - North Louisiana Synod or indeed the entire country would not be the same without you. Thank you for supporting Lutheran Campus Ministry here and elsewhere through praying for college students, faculty, and staff at colleges and universities. Thank you for referring graduating high school seniors to Lutheran Campus Ministries before they show up on campus. Thank you for cooking meals and sending financial support and showing up for fundraisers and chatting with college students when they come home to do laundry over a school break. Thank you for welcoming campus pastors into your congregations to preach and lead adult forums and spend time with your high school youth. Lutheran Campus Ministry here in Denton and all over the country would not be what it is today, let alone exist if it were not for congregations and individuals all over our Synod who support these essential ministries through prayer, financial support, referring students, and the like. So thank you, thank you, THANK YOU for being who you are!

You know, Lutheran Campus Ministry is such a unique ministry. We provide a safe, welcoming, and affirming space for students, faculty, and staff that is quite different to congregations. Lutheran Campus Ministry lives on the frontier of the church's life. We minister to Lutherans and non-Lutherans, Christian and non-Christian, religious and non-religious. We draw on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, to bear witness to God's amazing grace within the context of higher education when so many young adults are asking deep, profound questions about their lives and their faith. We reach out to all who teach and learn and work on campus, inviting them to experience the challenge of following Jesus and to

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experience the expansiveness of Christ's love. In other words, God is always placing us into situations that require compassion, grace, mercy, and creativity. In other words, we trust in God's abounding and steadfast love while we make things up as we go along.

And I cannot think of any other time in my 13+ years of ministry or in my lifetime that the entire Church has had to do the same thing. I've seen congregations shift their entire ministry to online. Others are adopting the model of a drive up movie theater and worshiping in that way. And even others are figuring out how to be physically present in the same space while avoiding being super spreaders of the novel coronavirus. The creativity and imagination that we are deploying is astounding! Of course, as good Lutherans, we are discussing what all this means for our liturgical practices and how we administer the sacraments, but people! I am impressed. I mean, sometimes the definition of Lutheran means "we reformed in 1517 and we will not change anymore. Here I stand. I can do no other." But we stepping out of our comfort zones and that age old phrase "But we've never done it that way before" no longer holds us bound!

I know this time is hard both individually and as a church. Has anybody else found themselves trying to focus on important work while their children run around them screaming? Has anybody else felt lonely and forgotten? Has anybody wished for the good, old days of February? I know I have. And yet... and yet... by the grace of God, we are adapting. In this time of drastic change, we are adapting. And I think today's Gospel lesson is about the same thing: the early church being led by God's grace to adapt its way of life in a time of drastic change.

Now, I admit that there is some irony in today's Gospel reading. We are in the midst of a pandemic and hand washing is an essential act of caring for ourselves and our wider community, and Jesus is saying it's not so important. He says what comes out of a person—their words and deeds—are what make a person unclean AND THEN!!! (PAUSE) And then he goes and calls a desperate, neglected woman a dog. Still, I think in these two stories we have Jesus modeling that traditions and rules should not hinder people from experiencing God's grace.

See, Matthew is writing to the church of his day, a church that was experiencing drastic change as it was becoming an increasingly blended community of Jews and Gentiles. On one hand you have Christians who were raised with certain traditions and were sorting through which of those traditions they wanted to carry forward into the church's life. And on the other hand, Christians who were not raised with those traditions, trying to sort through what it meant to join this religious community. So Matthew tells these two stories. One about long-held traditions that are now being used to exclude people from experiencing God's grace and one about a person should be excluded and yet refuses to be excluded.

It is as if, Matthew were saying, "What is necessary for us to share God's grace?" I certainly cannot answer that question for you, but I do know that moments that God grace has a way of breaking through when our lives and ways of doing things are interrupted. A former bishop of mine told me once that she when she heard sirens interrupting the sound of daily life, she heard them as the plea of this Canaanite woman: Kyrie eleison. Lord, have mercy!

I wonder, dear siblings in Christ, might this be that moment for you, your congregations, and communities? Might this be the moment where we are faced

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with wanting the world to return to February AND at the same time God is calling us to listen to the cries for mercy and grace?

I don't know what that this opportunity for new faithfulness means for you in the place you live, but I'll share some examples. One of my previous congregations has invested time and energy into creating PPE care packages for its members and community. A congregation in my hometown has turned its worship space into a space where the community can pick up free groceries because the unemployment rate is so high and it is located in a food desert, an area of town where there is no access to a grocery store. Our very own Briarwood has Bible Studies and worship and discussions and lip sync battles online. Our Synod staff are providing sermons and study material. And Lutheran Campus Ministry has been investing time, money, and energy so that even when we cannot gather in person for our weekly dinner worship and Bible study we can still provide sustenance for food insecure college students, face masks for college students who will need them when they return to campus, and support for students, faculty, and staff alike.

I know this new moment where we are caught between the old ways and the new ways is exhausting. But I also know that these are the moments when God is most present. These are the moments when we raise our voices like the Canaanite woman so that God might pull us from death into new life. This pandemic time may just be a resurrection time for you, your congregation, your community, and maybe even the entire Church!

My dear siblings in Christ, your faith in this "Kyrie, eleison" time... this "Lord, have mercy" time... this resurrection time is inspiring. Thank you for your witness of creativity and flexibility and compassion and grace in this time of global trauma

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and change. You all inspire me by how much you have stepped into roles similar to mine, living on the frontier of the Church. I pray for you all constantly and you all continue to inspire me. I look forward to the day when I can come visit with you in person, but in the meantime and in every time may you be confident in God's grace and love as you step out of your comfort zones and into resurrection zone.