

Sunday, July 21, 2024 – 9th Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Mark's gospel makes clear how great is the press of the crowd, with its countless needs to be met, on Jesus and his disciples. Yet in today's gospel Jesus advises his disciples to get away and rest, to take care of themselves. Sometimes we think that when others are in great need we shouldn't think of ourselves at all; but Jesus also honors the caregivers' need. We are sent from Christ's table to care for others and for ourselves.

Prayer of the Day

O God, powerful and compassionate, you shepherd your people, faithfully feeding and protecting us. Heal each of us, and make us a whole people, that we may embody the justice and peace of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ^{14a}I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Psalm 89:20-37

- ²⁰I have found David my servant;
with my holy oil have I anointed him.
- ²¹**My hand will hold him fast
and my arm will make him strong.**
- ²²No enemy shall deceive him,
nor shall the wicked bring him down.
- ²³**I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.**
- ²⁴My faithfulness and steadfast love are with him,
and he shall be victorious through my name.
- ²⁵**I will set his hand on the sea,
and his right hand on the rivers.**
- ²⁶He will say to me, 'You are my father,
my God, and the rock of my salvation.'
- ²⁷**I will make him my firstborn
and higher than the kings of the earth.**
- ²⁸I will keep my love for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
- ²⁹**I will establish his line forever
and his throne as the days of heaven."**
- ³⁰If his children forsake my teaching
and do not walk according to my judgments;
- ³¹**if they break my statutes
and do not keep my commandments;**
- ³²I will punish their transgressions with a rod
and their iniquities with the lash;
- ³³**but I will not take my love from him,
nor let my faithfulness prove false.**
- ³⁴I will not break my covenant,
nor change what has gone out of my lips.
- ³⁵**Once for all I have sworn by my holiness:
I will not lie to David.**
- ³⁶His line shall endure forever
and his throne as the sun before me;
- ³⁷**it shall stand fast forevermore like the moon,
the abiding witness in the sky."**

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:11-22

- ¹¹Remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—
- ¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of

Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Gospel: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Prayers of Intercession

One in the communion of saints and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we join our voices in prayer.

A brief silence.

For the church of Jesus Christ in this and every land: Through the One who is the cornerstone of a firm foundation, join us together and build us up as a temple of mercy and peace. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the creation: Cause new trees to be planted. Restrain the melting of polar ice caps. Save land from destruction. Like a shepherd tends her sheep, raise up from among us caretakers of all you have made. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the leaders of nations and heads of tribes. Where peace seems far off, bring it near. Where justice seems fleeting, bring it to light. Where discord seems relentless, bring harmony. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the health and well-being of family, friends, and neighbors: Heal those who are sick. Give courage to all who struggle with addiction. Touch with your tender care all who reach out to you in pain. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For this assembly and for the faith communities represented this week at the ELCA Youth Gathering: Nurture the faith of young people as they encounter new experiences and people. Break down dividing walls and inspire collaboration among people of every age. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In thanksgiving for those who have died, make us certain that in Christ we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints in the household of God. In your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, holy and merciful: into your outstretched arms we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in the one who is the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for this 9th Sunday after Pentecost

At Rest among Strangers

The world can be a dangerous place, and we all long for someone, some leader, who will watch over us and protect us from all harm. The prophet Jeremiah issues strong cautions to those who abuse the trust placed in them to care for God's people, and the psalmist sings the praises of the Lord who guards and guides us through life's trials.

But the letter to the Ephesians suggests that lasting safety comes through the healing and reconciling work of Christ, which allows us to share a meal with those we are inclined to regard as enemies, because Christ has "broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." So, in Christ, aliens become citizens and strangers become members of the household of God.

Living into this reality requires all of us to be diligent in our practices with and policies toward all kinds of "strangers and aliens" in our world and in our lives. It means making peace with those whose politics make them strange to us, and creating genuine welcome for the newcomer in our classrooms, workplaces and congregations. It means considering the needs of immigrants and refugees through the lens of Christian faith as well as national identity, and not assuming the two are the same.

The reassuring news this day is that God, unlike so many who hold power in this world, is already reconciling the world to God's own self and us to one another. We enact this new reality each time we pass the peace or come to the Lord's supper, not because we have finally achieved the peace we seek, but because in Christ God's future reign of peace has already broken into our present.



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