

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 12th Sunday After Pentecost - August 16, 2026

00:00

I'm debating about giving you the microphone saga story.

00:06

Let's just cut it short today, shall we?

00:08

I will be working from here during the sermon and

00:30

doing my best to project when I'm in other parts of the worship space today.

00:35

This is a celebration of International Youth Day,

00:41

and that takes place August 12th every year, and we are doing that the Sunday following.

00:47

And I heard Lily announce, but she did ask me to reiterate,

00:51

that the hymns will reflect that,

00:55

and here they are. And there's a high-pressure system that's work--no.

00:59

But yes, the hymns will reflect our singing today. After church, I will tell

01:05

you all about my horrendous week as a TV weather person. I think that's about the

01:13

time God said there may be other things we want you to be up to. But anyway, yes,

01:18

follow the board. The listed hymns won't match. The sermon today comes as a

01:29

Pastor Catherine Gohm, who is the assistant to the bishop, and

01:33

she is in dialogue with a young man, Rafael Rodriguez, who is director of public policy for the Synod.

01:40

And I learned just this week that the two of them are mother and son.

01:46

So it'll be interesting to hear the interplay between them as they talk about

01:50

International Youth Day and certainly as they grapple with what is probably one of the most difficult and

01:58

disturbing texts in the gospel.

02:02

So buckle up.

02:07

(gentle music)

02:28

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

02:30

Glory to you, oh Lord.

02:35

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them,

02:38

"Listen and understand.

02:41

"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person,

02:45

"but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

02:51

Then the disciples approached him and said to him,

02:54

"Do you know that the Pharisees took offense

02:57

heard what you said? He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not

03:03

planted will be uprooted. Let them alone, they are blind guides of the blind, and

03:11

if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to

03:19

Jesus, "Explain this parable to us." Then Jesus said, "Are you also still without

03:26

understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the

03:32

stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth and proceeds

03:38

from the heart, this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions.

03:45

Murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what

03:54

defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile. Jesus left that

04:01

place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite

04:10

woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord,

04:16

son of David. My daughter is tormented by a demon, but he did not answer her at all.

04:28

And his disciples came and urged him saying, "Send her away, she keeps shouting after us."

04:34

And Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and

04:42

and she knelt before him saying, "Lord, help me." And Jesus answered, "It is not fair

04:51

to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet

05:00

even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." And then Jesus

05:09

answered her, "Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish." And

05:17

her daughter was healed from that moment. The gospel of our Lord.

05:25

Won't you be seated.

The Sermon

05:32

Grace and peace to you.

05:36

This dialogue sermon between Raphael Rodriguez, the director of public policy in our Synod,

05:43

and Catherine Gohm, assistant to the bishop in our Synod, begins with Raphael's words.

05:52

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Matthew opens with a pivotal question from the

Pharisees to Jesus.

06:00

Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, for they do not

06:05

wash their hands before they eat? It is important to contextualize this in the

06:13

fuller context of the gospel. Jesus has performed miracles, feeding the 5,000,

06:20

walking on water, healing the sick. Yet the Pharisees question his authority and

06:26

and his faith on the basis of allowing his disciples to eat without claiming

06:32

their hands first. We can see in the verses immediately preceding our reading

06:39

today that this breeds a harsh rebuke from Jesus with him stating, "You

06:47

hypocrites Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said, 'This people

06:52

honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they

06:59

worship me teaching human precepts as doctrines. We can feel Jesus'

07:07

frustration building here, a frustration that seems to carry through all the way

07:13

to verse 26 in our Gospel reading. Jesus goes on to emphasize his point against

07:19

the Pharisees by saying, "Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the

07:25

mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

07:31

This statement seems clear enough, yet upon a conversation with his disciples,

07:38

the response he receives from Peter is one of confusion. "Explain this parable to

07:44

us, it hardly even seems a parable, more so a truism. And here again we see the

07:54

frustration of Jesus. Are you also still without understanding? It's almost as

08:02

though Jesus is asking, "What are you not getting here?"

08:09

This past Wednesday, August 12th, marked International Youth Day. It is in this

08:16

context that something dawned on me. It had never occurred to me before in all my

08:22

thinking of and interpretation of Jesus. He's really quite young here. If this

08:30

historical record of Jesus is accurate, he would have been somewhere between his

08:35

mid-twenties and his early thirties at the time of this scene. That puts Jesus

08:45

in a context where I can imagine and relate to his words far more deeply than

08:50

if I hold them up as solely the divine teachings of an older person. In many

08:57

ways I empathize deeply with this young frustrated Jesus. I can't count the

09:04

number of times I've been speaking or even arguing with older peers, teachers,

09:10

my own mother, and having the thought, "What's not clicking for you here? Are you

09:16

also still without understanding?" More broadly, I think I can speak with a

09:25

relative amount of certainty that this is largely the feeling of youth

09:30

worldwide. We have grown up in an incredibly turbulent time. Large-scale,

09:39

long-lasting wars have become entrenched and normalized again. The climate aches

09:45

and groans under the weight of centuries of industrialism and exploitation.

09:51

Economic opportunity seems to escape us at every turn as youth unemployment

09:56

grows steadily across the globe.

10:00

Children, young workers, and students

10:02

have been banging at the doors of power for decades now,

10:07

whether it be the youth climate movement founded over two

10:11

decades ago, the student encampments that

10:13

popped up on university campuses in opposition

10:17

to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, or the millions of Indian youth

10:22

who have banded under the banner of the Cockroach Janata Party,

10:30

taking on the insult of the word.

10:34

We have been screaming, are you still without understanding?

10:38

Don't you see what's flowing from your heart

10:40

and how it's defiling the world in its entirety?

10:45

I think a young, frustrated Jesus

10:47

would feel right at home in any of these spaces.

10:52

For far too long, these cries have fallen on hardened hearts.

10:57

What has come from the hearts of our older and adult leaders?

11:02

What has come from following the traditions of the past?

11:06

What are we witnessing now is increased funding

11:09

for weapons of war and destruction,

11:12

billions in government subsidies for oil and gas pipelines,

11:16

the gutting of social systems in favor of corporate welfare,

11:21

and greed.

11:24

If what comes from the heart is what defiles,

11:27

as Jesus teaches, it must also be true

11:31

that what comes from the heart can breathe God's justice

11:35

into the world.

11:37

We may live to see this when we can open our own hearts

11:41

to the youth.

11:43

In the words of the Indian author, Adirondhati Roy,

11:47

writing in regard to the aforementioned cockroach

11:51

genada party and their solidarity protests

11:54

against corruption in their country, these words,

11:59

"The young have given us a gift.

12:01

It is up to us all, every one of us,

12:05

to make what they have done matter."

12:14

Reverend Catherine Gohm writes these words.

12:19

"And so this religious debate between Jesus and the Pharisees on what defiles is an inter-familial

12:28

argument, differing viewpoints on what defiles.

12:32

It is a debate, however, that cannot stay there.

12:36

Religious faith and understanding is to be lived out in the world through daily encounters.

12:43

The scene shifts in Matthew's Gospel today, but the topic stays the same.

12:50

The meeting between Jesus and his disciples with the Canaanite woman in the area of Tyre

12:56

and Sidon is where, pardon my use of fossil fuel product imagery, the rubber hits the

13:04

road.

13:06

A mother's desperately defined healing for her child is where Jesus' own teachings about

13:13

about what comes from the heart must be lived out. As the preacher Barbara Brown

13:22

Taylor writes in a sermon on this same text, all the talk about clean and

13:27

unclean and about what defiles is really talk about barriers and lines drawn. The

13:36

gospel hands them to us. It is a woman who approaches Jesus, a Canaanite, a common

13:44

ancestor othered through occupation and force, a pagan worshipper of Baal and

13:50

other gods, an outsider separated through ethnicity and religious practice. We hear

14:00

her desperately, "Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David." And what she receives is

14:10

silence. Yet her anguished words keep ringing out, so much so the disciples are

14:17

irritated by her and want her sent away. But she keeps shouting into that barren

14:23

space out of love for her child. This mother, this Canaanite woman, is the

14:32

conclusion of Jesus debate with the Pharisees. In this scene shift we are

14:39

getting the same frustrated Jesus are we? Because when Jesus' disciples say

14:46

something to him does he respond not to the woman's desperation but rather to

14:51

lecture them on his mission. I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of

14:58

Israel. Her sad plight does not seem enough to move him. Recognizing who he is,

15:06

this insistent mother kneels before him praying, pleading. Then we hear some of

15:14

the harshest words that leave Jesus' mouth. It is not fair to take the

15:19

children's food and throw it to the dogs. Not only does he not respond to her

15:26

desperate appeal, he insults her while remaining untouched by her circumstance.

15:34

Children, that is the Israelites, are to get the food and to be included in the

15:39

community of God. Dogs, this woman and her kind, are not meant to be fed and are

15:47

excluded from the community of God. It's hard to understand this Jesus. I would

15:56

prefer this encounter between Jesus and the woman to be like a literary device

16:02

by Matthew, a tension that drives the story forward. That way Jesus' reputation

16:09

in my eyes would remain intact. That is, his response to people was always

16:15

compassionate and inclusive as I have both preached and proclaimed. But what if

16:24

Jesus is frustrated? What if we consider that a very human Jesus also struggles

16:31

with who is in and who is out with barriers erected and drawn lines? The

16:45

much like the students from the cockroach janta party and she says yes

16:50

Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs from the master's table. More than a

16:57

smart comeback she is saying I know who you are and I believe in what you can do.

17:07

Jesus hears. Jesus hears her faith. With her unrelenting urging, Matthew tells us

17:16

that Jesus steps beyond the traditions of his religious understanding and moves

17:22

across seemingly barren spaces to encounter her and her need. With this

17:31

year's International Youth Day theme, different contexts, common aspirations, I

17:38

cannot help but to think about youth and the young people in our church across

17:42

the globe. Are we listening to their pleas? Do we understand what it means for

17:50

them to be young today? Do we trust our younger selves and remember what we

17:57

dreamed of and hoped for? Or are we too caught up in lines drawn, barriers

18:05

erected to invite young people fully into our shared life together to

18:11

incorporate their experiences, wisdom, and understanding into our common life,

18:17

both in and outside the church? Perhaps the rubber of our faith hasn't always

18:24

hit the road of the gospel. Perhaps we have not let ourselves be shaped by the

18:31

encounter. Pastor Nancy Kelly wrote a book titled "Here Be Wonders" the Gospels

18:41

Pulse in Unsettled Times. To paraphrase part of her story called "The Lane Way"

18:48

she writes about a shared lane way that existed behind St. Mark's Lutheran Church

18:53

and the neighboring high school, Kitchener Collegiate Institute or KCI. The

19:00

shared laneway that mapped out encounter between people who found themselves

19:05

there. Congregation members, students, hospital visitors, and community groups

19:12

like AA. In the story, Kelly writes about a student angry because the taxi she was

19:21

in was blocked from people taking up space on the laneway. The students shouted insults

19:28

and the taxi driver at the taxi driver and then flicked the cigarette butted people.

19:35

Someone must have witnessed the interaction. A few days later a letter arrived at the church

19:42

written by the KCI student council addressed to Pastor Nancy and to St. Mark's. They had

19:51

on behalf of the school and the student body,

19:54

saying how much they appreciated the relationship they

19:57

had with the church.

20:00

Their apology was accepted.

20:02

Kelly writes that the church thanked the high school

20:05

for teaching the church something about forgiveness

20:09

and mending damaged bridges.

20:12

She writes further, contested and congested spaces,

20:17

rough spots in hearts, in communities,

20:20

and in the world, our places for bridges, bridges built, broken, and mended.

20:31

This is the gift of healing, wherever and whenever our hearts are open to listen and understand.

20:41

Amen.