

**September 9, 2018 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Isaiah 35:4-7a, Psalm 146**  
**James 2:1-10, 14-17 Mark 7:24-37**

Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, by Philip Hallie, pg. 127.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/le-chambon-village-takes-stand>.

Listen, Listen, Be Open, Oh My Heart, XXX

**Beloved of Christ Jesus, Grace and Peace. Amen.**

**This Sunday we are back to our two services, fall is here, the choir has warmed up.**

Next week we'll have Sunday School, and the Sunday Forum, and Youth Group.

Today, with congregations across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA, we celebrate what we call God's Work, Our Hands.

Take a look at your hands and think back over the last day—24 hours...

What have you done with your hands?

Perhaps you've been studying hard, honing your skills?

Maybe you wiped away some tears? Or created art or made music?

Maybe it's cooking or cleaning or washing or yardwork?

Maybe you pulled someone close in protection? Or cared for someone's body, or your own?

Perhaps you lifted your hands in prayer? Or maneuvered a bike or car? Or threw a football?

Maybe you gave a high five?

Or opened your wallet to write a check or swipe your card to help another's need?

Or did you hug or hold or light a candle? Or type a note? Or pick up the phone to reach out?

**It's God's work, but it's our hands that God uses to do this work.**

Today, in our congregation, we're doing a mini community organizing training.

We're practicing using our relationships, our power, to do God's work of co-creating justice, love.

**These last weeks I've been thinking about the little village of Le Chambon in south central France.**

During World War II, as Hitler's power rose, after France had fallen to the Germans,

this community sheltered many hundreds, perhaps a few thousand people who were Jewish and targeted by the Nazi regime.

In some cases they were able to flee to neutral Switzerland, but in many cases they stayed in people's homes, sheltered all around the countryside.

Rooted in their Christian, protestant, reformed, non violent, Huguenot tradition,

through their own form of community organizing,

the people of Le Chambon took this tremendous risk of aiding the Jewish community

or quietly letting the aiding happen simply because it was the right thing to do.

I can only begin to consider the complexity of the situation: the world in that moment, the community in discernment, the call of their faith, the need of their neighbors.

In writing about them, the researchers have over and over asked questions about Why.

One woman responded, “Look. Who else would have taken care of them if we didn’t?

They needed our help, and they needed it then.”

### **God’s Work. Our Hands.**

#### **Our Gospel reading this morning includes two stories, laced together.**

Jesus is on the move, maybe he is seeking some rest, we don’t really know, but so quickly he is found, when all of a sudden a mother is at his side, daring to plead for the health of her little daughter.

We’ve often read this awkward story as a test of this desperate woman’s faith.

The tradition has tried mightily to gloss over that derogatory way Jesus seems to at once brush off her need and to call her a dog.

The clues are sparse but scholars remind us that in this area—the areas around Tyre and Sidon—many in the Jewish community were peasants who *worked* the land.

We also learn that the gentiles *owned* the land, and this woman, we know, was a gentile.

Perhaps she was powerful, wealthy.

#### **Seems to me that this gospel interaction between Jesus and this woman**

is a lot more complex than we’ve traditionally understood.

There are issues of religion, but also ethnicity and race and prejudice, land ownership and power, economics and gender, compassion fatigue: they are all at play in today’s story.

#### **Dear Ones, God’s power is at work in the messy, complexity.**

At first glance, I’m not convinced that Jesus wants to hear this woman’s pain.

Goodness knows: listening well, hearing pain, acknowledging need, this all takes its toll, even on Jesus.

But she perseveres, and the Spirit moves: Jesus, it seems, changes his mind, he learns.

**In the verses that follow**, in the story of the man who could not hear, Jesus sighs and cries out, “Ephaphatha,” Be opened.

Laced with the first story, maybe it’s Jesus who is being opened, opened to cross lines of tribe and gender and religion, open to listening closely and hearing the pain and need around him.

#### **Maybe that’s the story of the day: Jesus is opened, he’s changed.**

Talk about Jesus changing his mind challenges some folks.

For others it’s a relief, for if Jesus can learn and grow... so can we.

**This morning we welcome Amanda Vetsch into our community.**

Amanda is our coach through the Riverside Innovation Hub; she'll be with us part time through the year.

This summer we received a grant that over three years will support deep listening, some healthy experimentation and the corresponding adaptation, all focused on young adult ministry.

Nick Tangen takes a lead from our staff,

An innovation team has formed and will be commissioned today.

The team includes Abby Lucas, Erika Larson, Will Heller, Kirsten Mebust and Doug Hartmann.

This week at a meeting Amanda described her coaching work at this early stage like this:

"Hanging out and listening, and helping us be more intentional about our listening."

**With the Syrophoenician woman, and the man who is deaf,**

Jesus embodies, models, an openness to listen, to learn, to change.

He uses simple stuff: spit, a little ear wax, but most of all he uses his willingness to let his heart be open.

That's a comfort, for in our own moments of stretching, learning, we don't need to feel ashamed.

**Indeed, that's part of the calling, the heart of what it means to be Christ's body.**

We die to sin, we die to our own rough edges, our own been-there-done-that preconceived ideas.

And in Christ we rise again to new life, new learning, new courage, new risks, new willingness to put our very bodies on the line, even, especially in the complexity of our time.

**We've experienced this in powerful ways in the Sanctuary movement.**

Opening ourselves to the honest stories of immigrants,

Opening ourselves to our own power, and lack of power in a broken immigration system.

Through that listening, that openness, we are being changed—I am convinced of it.

**I believe we've also felt this new life as we've spent more time outside this summer:**

worshipping each month on the lawn by the patio,

gardening and then more gardening,

supporting the Farmers Market,

constructing the bread oven,

and then hanging out, making pizza and listening well.

Have you noticed the way students, neighbors are lingering around the oven?

That's good, it's conducive to listening, and listening well, listening deeply, being changed.

**In Le Chambon, the small French village of resistance, of sanctuary,**

years later,

Magda Trocmé, the wife of the pastor who had been so involved,

said in reflection:

“In the end I would like to say to people,

‘Remember that in your life there will be lots of circumstances where you will need a kind of courage,

a kind of decision on your own,

not about other people but about yourself.’” About yourself.

**It’s God’s work, dear ones, and it’s our hands,**

it’s our courage,

it’s our time,

it’s our calling.

Remember who we are, and even more, remember whose we are.

For this life in Christ has the power to open us and we will not be the same.

That’s good news. Amen.