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Acts 8:26-40; Matthew 15:21-28
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Usually I'm pretty good a not allowing myself to get dragged down by the news of the day,

- but as I mentioned last weekend,

- I was deeply moved and saddened by the events in Charlottesville,

- and as the story continued to unfold this week,

- I kept allowing myself to get sucked into swirl of information -

- this tweet -

- leads to that post -

- which leads to another tweet -

- and an additional story -

- and another and another and another. -

- Now the logical part of me -

- knows that I need to turn off the tv, -

- close the app,

- ignore the notification, - -

- but I just couldn't seem to do it this week -

- to borrow from the Apostle Paul, -

- I find myself doing the very thing -

- I don't want to do - -

- But the reason I think I can't turn away is because I care, -

- I care about the state of our world,
- I care about the way that God's people treat one another,
- I care about the words and images that are shared -
- and the impact those words have on our neighbors,
- on our children,
- on our hearts, - -
- so even though I find myself wanting to turn away -
- from the ugliness of the last week -
- I nevertheless kept digging into -
- the stories again and again - -
- looking for a seed of hope, -
- listening for how God's Word, - -
- for how God's story
- might intersect or impact the events around us, -
- seeking to discover the ways that
- Jesus' ministry and the early church's witness -
- might speak to our world that is so divided and united,
- so selfish and so caring,
- so confused and so over-confident.
- Now I realized that what I just said -
- may sound a little odd - -
- after all how can you be divided and united

- selfish and caring,
- confused and over-confident all at the same time - -
- but as I look around in the midst of our communities -
- across the world -
- that's what I see - -
- division and unity,
- selfishness and caring,
- confusion and over-confidence.
- The division, of course, has become very obvious recently. - -
- It's not new, but it's more obvious than ever - -
- Certainly the world saw in that procession of torches -
- on a Friday night in Charlottesville, -
- a clear sign of the division and hatred in the world,
- and if we started to forget even a little, -
- the events Spain highlighted it again - -
- but those are just current examples -
- around the globe - -
- across history this "Us/Them" approach to life -
- that blames another for your problems -
- is a pattern that repeat time and time again. - -
- We are divided, and yet -
- realistically we are more united as a world than ever before in history -

- 140 characters posted in DC -
 - is heard around the world in an instant. -
- A doctor in South America -
 - can be consult with a specialist in India -
 - and a drug which manufactured in Canada -
 - can bring healing -
 - to someone who might have died. -
- The products we buy,
 - the food we eat,
 - are from all over the world. -
 - We are united on a global scale -
 - and that's not going to change. - -
- We are divided, but we are united -
 - We are selfish and we are caring - -
 - We expect most everything to be tailored to our personal needs
 - Each of us has our own customized channels for entertainment. -
 - We self-select our news outlets,
 - so we mostly don't have to listen to the opinions
 - of people we disagree with. -
 - One of the first questions most people consider, -
 - whether it is stated or not, -
 - is often, "What's in it for me?"

- And yet -
 - we are more generous as a nation -
 - than we have ever been -
 - charitable giving is at a record level -
 - volunteers flow freely -
 - to projects that clearly make a difference in the world - -
 - Stories of compassion -
 - get millions of views and clicks online - -
- We are divided, but we are united -
 - We are selfish, and we are caring - -
 - We are confused and over-confident. -
 - As a book I was reading this week pointed out,
 - we have more access to information than ever before, -
 - but we often lack the wisdom and experience -
 - to filter that information in helpful ways. - -
 - We know how to order dinner, -
 - but many people don't know where the food comes from -
 - or how to cook it. -
 - We have millions of people asking the question -
 - "So what does this mean?
 - What is my purpose in life?"
 - and they feel like answers are few and far between - -

- And yet -

- how many people move forward in life -

- absolutely confident that their way is correct -

- absolutely sure that the other sides are wrong

- and have nothing to add - -

- refusing to admit -

- that they have or ever could make a mistake. - -

- We are divided, but we are united -

- We are selfish, and we are caring - -

- We are confused, and we are over-confident -

- But you know what -

- none of that changes the fact -

- that first and foremost,

- we are and always will be children of God. - -

- For no matter how broken and divided we may be - -

- in Christ we are united.

- no matter how selfish and caring we may be, -

- God's love for us is unchanging

- no matter how confused or over-confident we may be, -

- God meets us where we are and walks with us -

- as we seek to move forward in life. - -

- There is no doubt that we live in interesting times, - -

- but then again so did Jesus and the early church - -
- political and religious divisions were pronounced, -
- there was open animosity between cultural groups -
- violence was a common part of daily life - -
- which is why -
- the teachings of Jesus -
- the examples of the early church -
- can be so helpful -
- so powerful as we look for insight into how we face
- some of the issues in our world today - -
- as we look for a model for how we might witness -
- to Jesus' saving love in the midst of our communities - -

Now to be sure some of the examples, - -

- some of the models are pretty obvious - -
- Love one another as I have loved you -
- is a good starting point for any situation in life, - -
- but even texts that perhaps don't seem to speak directly to today's world -
- like the conversation between Jesus and the Cannanite woman -
- and Philip's witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch -
- remind us that when we invest ourselves -
- in listening to and learning from scripture, -
- there is wonderful wisdom and guidance -

- that applies to our lives - -

- In Matthew today, for example,

- we see Jesus approached by a woman -

- from a different culture - -

- and the initial reaction of the Jesus and the disciples -

- feels a little too familiar - -

- Jesus ignores her

- and the disciples say -

- ‘Send her away,

- for she keeps shouting after us.’

- They don’t know her -

- She’s not one of them.

- She’s annoying.

- They want Jesus to ignore her -

- to pretend there isn’t a problem -

- and to move on - - -

- that would be the easiest thing to do - -

- And interestingly,

- Jesus for his part, acknowledges -

- that this woman isn’t a part of the community he came to help - -

- ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’

- in other words -

- she's not one of us -
- and yet, the woman persisted in her pleas -
- "Lord, help me."
- and Jesus pushes back again -
- questioning whether the woman and her daughter are worthy of God's help -
- 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'
- Clearly these groups of people -
- don't see each other as equals -
- and it makes me cringe to hear Jesus
- compare her and her people to a dog -
- but the woman isn't deterred by those words - -
- "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."
- No maybe Jesus' words were meant to see where her heart was -
- maybe it was something else - we don't know, -
- but here's what we can say for sure, Jesus is impressed by her faith - -
- 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'
- And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matt 15:21-28)
- Now I won't try and put words in Jesus' mouth -
- and my guess is that we lack some regional, historical context
- that would help us make sense of the exchanges between Jesus and the woman,
- but in the simplest of terms -
- Jesus listens to an opposing point of view -

- and decides it has merit and he amend his original decision. -
- Jesus willingly looks past the cultural and religious differences
 - between his group -
 - and this woman, -
 - and extends God's healing and help
 - to her and to her daughter - -
- So what might it look like -
 - if we applied the Biblical lessons from this interaction -
 - between Jesus, the disciples and this woman to our lives - -
- Well I think it might mean that we try and
 - Listen to one another -
 - Not assuming that because of how someone looks
 - or where they are from -
 - or what they post -
 - that we know what they are thinking -
 - or can judge their hearts -
- It might mean being willing to look past
 - our initial snap judgements -
 - and allow God's love to shape our response -
 - even if it means we have to re-assess our original position
- and it might mean that we remain faithful -
 - and steadfast in our belief in God and what God can do -

- even if we don't see the results we want right away - -
- Now does Matthew say those things explicitly -
 - No -
 - but as Lutherans, we believe scripture is not simply a historical document, -
 - but it is God's living Word -
 - that continues to speak to our lives -
 - to shape and form us -
 - bringing old teachings to life in new ways today.
- The story in Acts offers a similar opportunity to be shaped by God's living Word,,
 - we hear how the angel sends Philip, -
 - who it appears is a non-Jewish convert to Christianity,
 - who is possibly of middle eastern or Greek heritage -
 - sends Philip to bring the good news about Jesus' saving love for the world -
 - to an Ethiopian Eunuch, -
 - to an African man living a dramatically different life than Philip - -
 - Philip goes where the Angel leads, -
 - willingly reaching out to a stranger on a dangerous road, -
 - teaching this outsider from a faraway land about Jesus, -
 - baptizing him -
 - and welcoming him to God's family of faith. - -
- To me,
 - It's a powerful example -

- of being obedient to God's Word, -
 - of responding to a call to witness -
 - even when it means
 - going somewhere you didn't expect to go
 - and talking to someone you don't know. - -
- So what might it look like -
 - if we applied the Biblical lessons from this interaction -
 - between Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch to our lives - -
- Well I think it could mean that make an effort to be open
 - to going where the Spirit leads -
 - even if it is a little frightening
 - even if it pushes us to interact with the world -
 - in ways we might not have expected. - -
- I think it could mean that we
 - try and look past cultural barriers to see
 - that the person who looks and sounds different from us
 - is first and foremost as a child of God -
 - who is love and valued by Jesus. - -
- I think it could mean that we
 - are willing to tell the story of Jesus to another person -
 - to be a witness to what Jesus' means in our lives - -
 - even if that involves talking to someone we don't know - -

- And again does Acts say those things explicitly -

- No -

- but as we are shaped and formed

- by God's living Word -

- as the Spirit moves in our hearts -

- I am convinced that we discover God's wisdom and guidance -

- to help us navigate our divided and united,

- selfish and caring,

- confused and over-confident world.

- For no matter what our other affiliations may be -

- when we commit ourselves -

- to making our foundation the teaching of Jesus -

- and the examples of the early church, -

- I am convinced that we can help build a more loving, peaceful

- and hope-filled world.