

Sermon for 16 August 2026 @ Bethesda United Methodist Church/Baltimore, Maryland

Scriptures: Genesis 45:1-15; Psalter: 850 Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:10-28

Sermon: Forgiveness, reunion, God's awesome mercy ... From our childhood, we cannot forget the moving nature of this first Scripture throughout our lives ...

Then the sweet, simple reminder of the Psalm of how precious dwelling together in harmony can be in family life.

Quickly Romans returns us to the redemptive mystery of God's ways with Israel, using the resistance of this chosen people in the larger story of bringing all humankind together, past solidarity, past confidence, into the wideness of divine love, our passage for today ends with the humbling sentence, "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."

This is why we meet regularly: To learn, to grow, to be reminded past any wisdom of our own, the power that shields and consumes all our human insight. Trust, fellow beloveds in faith: Nothing can compare to the frequent reminder of divine love and caretaking of all humanity, and all nature. Thanks be for the pull that brings us back into each other's company, with its stories, songs, insights, and steadiness of gathering to learn and to grow in our own power to adore, and to hold fast to the sense of unity and blessing.

We close with Jesus' simple, basic teaching that nothing compares to what we DO rather than what we think... and then his own wisdom itself being bested by the desperate mother's "Yes, my lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table," and Jesus' sublime admission to her wisdom, with the scripture's revelatory, "And her daughter was healed from that moment."

There is indeed plenty to preach on in this set of texts... but I want to close with an idea that has borne in on me this week, as I looked again at two books in our church office which have been offered to us by me over the years and rejected by us as a congregation until now. Both are books about renewal, in our day and time, of church life and study and influence on the larger community around us. In both cases, we are offered wisdom by people in our time, and even our

Baltimore/Washington region, who applied Jesus' teaching to local communities and to themselves as congregations falling behind in membership and effectiveness in their regions. Let me close with a prayer on this point:

"Lord, we have much going right in our mission, our approach, and your use of our skills. Our day care, our companionship with the other church with which we share space, our offerings of food and contributions to ministries outside our own reach ... and our space for the admirable twelve-step program that is practiced several nights each week. Yet Lord, we do not relate to our surrounding area with the positive influence we might. There are ways of opening our doors and ourselves to the issues of our area and moment which we have not grown into as time and age have shrunk our numbers. Guide us to consider contemporary wisdom and insight more than we have. Teach us to read the times and practice the contemporary reminders that come our way afresh. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.