

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, August 16, 2020**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 20/Proper 15/Year A**  
**First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8**  
**Second Reading: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**  
**Gospel Reading: Matthew 15:10-28**  
**Sermon Title: “An Example of Faith”**

## **Theme**

*Jesus teaches his disciples that true purity is a matter of the heart rather than outward religious observances. Almost immediately, this teaching is tested when a woman considered to be a religious outsider approaches him for help.*

## **Text**

[<sup>10</sup>[Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand:<sup>11</sup>it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” <sup>12</sup>Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” <sup>13</sup>He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup>Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” <sup>15</sup>But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” <sup>16</sup>Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup>Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? <sup>18</sup>But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”]

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” <sup>24</sup>He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” <sup>26</sup>He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>27</sup>She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

## Sermon

Maybe you noticed in the presentation of the Gospel text on the slides, that there are two seemingly unrelated stories included in the Gospel Reading.

[<sup>10</sup>[Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, ... but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”]

And when these brackets are used, it is an indication that the lectionary editors have made the passage contained within, optional to the rest of the reading. So even the lectionary editors appear to be unconvinced that the two seemingly unrelated stories should be together. And while this might not be interesting to you, it is fascinating to me. Allow me to tell you why.

The first part, verses 10-20, the part bracketed, refer back to the previous passage which you did not hear, in which Jesus had just done battle with the Pharisees and the scribes who had been stalking him and his Disciples and observed that his Disciples at least, ate with soiled hands, an act that was forbidden by the Law of Moses. I am certain that if Jesus was our contemporary, he would be washing his hands and washing them frequently, but in the first century, there was no pandemic. Jesus responded rather harshly to them by pointing out that there are several laws that they don't observe that are as equally, what?, *inconvenient*, as not washing one's hands, and that many of their "Laws" and traditions "void the word of God" (15:6).

So in setting the stage for the Gospel Reading, what we have are the prim and proper religious Jewish folks who work very hard at keeping the Law, even when the Laws, made up by overly religious men, are impractical and are in contrast to the word of God, as Jesus saw it.

Then, in our Gospel Reading, Jesus turned to the crowds around him and clarified what he meant. He said, <sup>10</sup>“Listen and understand:<sup>11</sup>it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” The Disciples were concerned that Jesus had offended the Pharisees and scribes and mentioned it to Jesus who said, 'Ah forget them. They are deluded with what they think they know about living a godly life.' So we have here, the example of the Pharisees and scribes who were super religious.

Moving on to the second part of the Gospel Reading, we have this pesky Canaanite woman. She reminds me of those sand gnats they have down in South Carolina. Do you know what I mean? We used to live down there and when we went to the beach they would just keep buzzing my ears and nose and eyes to the degree that it was difficult to enjoy the beach. Well, this woman, a Canaanite woman, just kept it up, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

Here is the problem, in the same way that I did not invite the sand gnats to bother me at the beach, Jesus and his Disciples who were Jews, did not invite Canaanites to their ministry. You see the Canaanites were the pagan people left when the Jews took over the Promised Land. Though Joshua was told to wipe them out when the Israelites took possession of the land across the Jordan, they didn't, and instead, made treaties and intermarried, and adopted some of their pagan gods and rituals and so on, all of which was an abomination to God. So, as you can imagine, good observant Jews had nothing to do with these people whom they saw as unclean and unloveable.

But she kept on, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." The Disciples wanted Jesus to send her away. What did happen is often misunderstood. It appears as though Jesus tried to be done with her, and used expressions that are difficult for us to hear:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Really? We think. Did Jesus reject her, we ask?

Then, rather than accept her rejection, she came closer, knelt before him, and begged, "Lord, help me." Awe, Jesus, you're going to do the right thing right?

And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." What? We are outraged! Did our Lord Jesus call this poor desperate woman with a sick child, a dog?

Even then, she had a desperate response, and we are hoping that Jesus will show some mercy. And he did.

You will be relieved to know that many commentators on this passage believe that what was going on here is that Jesus was taking advantage of the situation to make it a teachable moment.

On one side we have these overly religious entitled Pharisees and scribes, Jews who thought they were *in the club* and all else were *excluded*.

And on the other side, we had this poor desperate woman who truly was excluded who saw in Jesus, someone whom she recognized and called out to as Lord and Son of David. Those words were not used casually in Israel in the First Century. They had meaning, they were sacred, reserved only for those in whom was the hope of Israel. The Pharisees and the scribes did not call Jesus Lord and Son of David, in fact, they would soon begin plotting to kill him. But this poor desperate woman, a Canaanite at that, saw what others could not.

In witnessing her great faith in him, Jesus commended her and said, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Remember, the Pharisees and scribes on one side. This poor desperate Caananite woman on the other, and all the crowds and Jesus' own Disciples were watching. It was a teachable moment. And what he just taught was that there is no entitlement. Oh but you might say, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11 that God's calling of the Jews is "irrevocable" and that is true. God will not revoke it, but the Jews can, and by worshiping a god of their own creation instead of the God of Creation makes their salvation questionable. According to Jesus' teaching here, people will be judged on their lives of faithfulness to God, not a set of man-made rules.

And lest we think that Jesus turned his back on his Jewish faith, let us direct our attention to the First Reading in which the LORD God said, through the prophet Isaiah,

Maintain justice, and do what is right,  
for soon my salvation will come,  
and my deliverance be revealed.

<sup>6</sup>And the *foreigners* who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,

and to be his servants,  
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,  
and hold fast my covenant—  
<sup>7</sup>*these* I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
*for all peoples.*  
<sup>8</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather *others* to them  
besides those already gathered.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

If you want to know God, then you need not look any farther than Jesus. Jesus is the revelation of God. Jesus is God incarnate.

His preaching and teaching and his example are what God wants us to know about himself. And in this story, what Jesus wants us to know about his Heavenly Father is that he is the creator of all, and he loves all he creates, and as his disciples, we ought to love the world that our Heavenly Father created with compassion and constancy. And I believe that God believes that when we get that right, people will be drawn to us so that we can tell them about the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

### **Prayer**

Loving Creator God, intuitively it makes sense to us that you love all that you create, and yet we encounter some who are just unloveable to us. Or is it us who are unwilling to love someone not like us. No matter the problem, we pray that you have a solution. Send us your Holy Spirit that we might shed our hatred and prejudices and love all people with the love of a parent for a child. We pray this in the name of your Son Jesus, our Lord. Amen