**Weekend of Sunday, August 20, 2023**

**12th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 20/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: *“Inclusive Love: Transformed Lives”***

**Theme**

In Isaiah we hear that God’s house shall be a house of prayer for all people and that God will gather the outcasts of Israel. The Canaanite woman in today’s gospel is a Gentile, an outsider, who is unflinching in her request that Jesus heal her daughter. As Jesus commends her bold faith, how might our church extend its mission to those on the margins of society? In our gathering around word and meal we receive strength to be signs of comfort, healing, and justice for those in need.

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8**

 1Thus says the Lord:
  Maintain justice, and do what is right,
 for soon my salvation will come,
  and my deliverance be revealed.

 6And 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—
 7these 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.
 8Thus says the Lord God,
  who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
 I will gather others to them
  besides those already gathered.

**Second Reading: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

 [Paul writes:] 1I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2aGod has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

 29For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, 31so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. 32For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

**Gospel: Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28**

 [10[Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand:11it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” 12Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” 13He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” 15But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” 16Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? 18But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. 19For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. 20These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”]
 21Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22Just 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.” 23But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” 24He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 27She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

**Sermon**

I have entitled this sermon, “Inclusive Love: Transformed Lives because in each of the readings, we have prophecies, teachings, and stories of examples of “Inclusive Love” leading to “Transformed Lives.” And just to be clear, the inclusive love I am referring to is the love of God, and the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and the transformed lives are, I hope, ours, because I believe these readings teach us that that is God’s goal.

examples/In the book of Isaiah, we read, "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand, and my righteousness will soon be revealed" (Isaiah 56:1). These words remind us of the importance of living in alignment with God's will and purpose.

In the passage from Romans, the Apostle Paul speaks of God's unrelenting love and mercy. He writes, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2a). Despite the struggles, failures, and shortcomings we may experience, God's love remains steadfast. He never gives up on us, and He extends His mercy to all.

In Matthew's Gospel, we encounter a remarkable encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. She approached Jesus, pleading for the healing of her daughter. At first, Jesus seemed to rebuff her, but her unwavering faith and persistence touched His heart. He exclaimed, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted" (Matthew 15:28). This encounter teaches us about the power of faith and the profound impact it can have on our lives.

My friends, these passages remind us that God's love knows no boundaries. In His eyes, there is no distinction based on race, nationality, or social status. He calls us to embrace justice and righteousness, and to love one another unconditionally.

In a world often divided by differences, it is crucial to remember that we are all created in the image of God. Our differences should not separate us but rather unite us in the shared journey of faith. It is through embracing diversity and acknowledging the intrinsic value of every individual that we fulfill God's vision for His creation.

When we open our hearts to God's inclusive love, we witness the transformative power of His grace. Just as the Canaanite woman's faith moved Jesus, our unwavering trust in God can move mountains and overcome obstacles. Let us never underestimate the power of our faith and the impact it can have on our lives and the lives of others.

Furthermore, we must be aware of the danger of self-righteousness and exclusion. Jesus himself warned against focusing on external rituals and appearances while neglecting the purity of the heart. He emphasized that true defilement comes from within, from evil thoughts and intentions (Matthew 15:10-11). We are called to examine our hearts, to cleanse them of prejudice, and to cultivate a spirit of love and compassion towards all.

Let us take a moment to reflect on our own lives. Are we actively seeking justice and righteousness? Are we extending love and mercy to those who may be different from us? Are we nurturing a faith that is unyielding, trusting in God's grace even in the face of adversity?

Today, let us renew our commitment to living as children of God, embracing the diversity of His creation, and allowing His love to shine through us. May our lives be a testament to His inclusive love, and may we be agents of change in a world that longs for unity and acceptance.

Remember, my friends, God's salvation is close at hand, and His righteousness will be revealed. Let us go forth, rooted in faith, guided by love, and committed to justice. May we be living examples of the transformative power of God's love, bringing hope, healing, and reconciliation to a world in need.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

**Prayer**

 Amen