

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

August 16, 2020

Psalm 67:1–7

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us

and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

2 that your way may be known on earth,

your saving power among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you!

4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

for you judge the peoples with equity

and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you!

6 The earth has yielded its increase;

God, our God, shall bless us.

7 God shall bless us;

let all the ends of the earth fear him!

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 56:1; 6–8

1 Thus says the LORD:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,

for soon my salvation will come,

and my righteousness be revealed.

6 “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,
everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant—
7 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.”

8 The Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
“I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered.”

EPISTLE: Romans 11:1; 13–15; 28–32

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

THE GOSPEL: Matthew 15:21–28

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Sermon 30 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

"Gather the Dogs"

Matthew 15:21-28

Dear friends,

The readings for this week echo a similar theme, and that is bringing the outsiders inside. Jesus talks about this in the Gospel lesson, Paul uses this to buttress his themes in the epistle, and Isaiah goes right up and says it. So with all these readings all kind of pushing this, you have only a certain number of directions to go in, so let's do that. In the Gospel lesson specifically Jesus highlights an uncomfortable fact that we tend to pretend doesn't exist, but the weird thing is that this was a fact and is no longer thanks to Jesus' work. Let me show you what I mean by that.

"21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly."

Tyre and Sidon is a Gentile region, these are non-Jews, they are pagans, and the woman who approaches our Lord is a Canaanite, one of Israel's oldest enemies. Canaanites were Israel's enemies, I remind you, because God commanded it. This is not a simple case of human hatred, this is divine decree. If Israel had done their job back in the OT, this woman would not exist. Her

bloodline would have ended at the edge of an Israelite sword, because back in the book of Joshua God commanded the extermination of the Canaanites. Please keep that in mind. These two have no reason to be nice to each other, but this is not what we actually see in the story. It is always more complicated than a story of racial hatred, even when the hatred is by God's own command.

Look at how the Canaanite woman addresses Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew in particular, Jesus is not called "Lord," except by those who get it, namely the disciples and a select few others. Everyone likes to call Jesus "Rabbi" in the book of Matthew. Yet this woman, after crying out and making a scene for what seems to be quite a significant period of time, finally gets desperate enough to push her way through and get in front of Jesus Himself, and she calls Jesus Lord. She calls Him Son of David, a title that has no business at all coming from Canaanite lips. How the heck does this enemy of Israel even know who David is, let alone Jesus' bloodline? These are the words of a believer. Everything about this woman suggests that she understands full well who this man is, He is Messiah, He is God, He is the one promised, He is the only one who can save me and my little girl.

To us, this merits little more than a shrug, but to the disciples this must've been nothing less than shocking. This girl is a Canaanite. She is an enemy. She is a dumb pagan. Yet she perfectly grasps who Jesus is and more importantly what Jesus can do for her. The Canaanite woman has settled on Jesus as the only one that can save her. They forgot the Old Testament lesson, as well as the many other places in the Bible where God talks about the Jews being the firstborn race of humanity. The Jews hear about God first, they get the covenant, but God is out to save every human being, not just this silly little middle-eastern bloodline. **"Thus says the Lord: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed... 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... THESE I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer."** This Canaanite woman is evidence enough of God doing that. Canaanites are enemies of God, He says this very clearly, yet God has gathered her just as he gathered our ancestors in their own time.

You see this also in Jesus' response, and there's a translation issue here that I had to have pointed out to me because I missed it. So when the woman finally gets through, gets in front of Jesus, she says Lord help me, and Jesus' response is great. **"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. She said, 'Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."** Ding ding ding! She gets her daughter healed, right?

Not really. For years I thought that what Jesus was doing was testing the woman, and she answered right, and He does what she wants cause she answered right. That's what this always seemed like. Jesus tests, woman answers correctly, she gets her way because of it. But that's not what's happening. Look at verse 27, if you would please, look at this woman's answer. Let me reread this verse for you on the basis of what the Greek says. Yes, Lord, BECAUSE even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

This woman isn't questioning Jesus, she's AGREEING with Jesus. Earlier, Jesus said that he is sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But who's Israel? Israel is the children that God rescues from the world. Israel is the sinners that God makes holy. Yes, Lord, the woman says, but you are here to feed everyone from the masters table. You are here to bring in the dogs, to make the dogs your children. Think of the work of Christ! He takes men from every nation and gives them faith, makes them holy, and invites them to a place at His table. Was it offered to Israel first? Sure. No doubt about that. But Jesus is here to open the master's table, to open God's family, to all, even the dogs, which is a fairly apt description of us sinners. Dogs were not well thought of in this culture, and so we are. Dogs.

But what we are doesn't change what God does for us. We are not Israelites, but we were offered what they rejected. We are dogs, and God doesn't demand that His dogs clean up and become something else. God doesn't demand that His dogs go behind the woodshed and sleep in the kennel. God brings the dogs in and feeds them Himself. He brings us into the covenant intended for Israel, by opening up the doors to all who are willing to confess that they are sinners and that they need Jesus.

Amen