

11th Sunday After Pentecost (A) 8/16/20 youtube link:

TEXT: Matthew 15:10-28

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DIVISIONS are running RAMPANT today!

--ESPECIALLY in the world of POLITICS.

--DEFINITELY in the world of RACE and NATIONALITY.

Like George Orwell's well known satire "Animal Farm" says:

"All animals are equal.

But some animals are more equal than other animals."

HOW can we OVERCOME the DIVISIONS...the INEQUALITY...

...the PREJUDICE ...and the PROBLEMS

--that COME with these ATTITUDES?

It's so EASY to say:

"It's those blankety-blank DEMOCRATS and NANCY PELOSI supporters!

THEY are the ones who are dividing EVERYBODY!"

And it's so EASY to say:

"It's those blankety-blank REPUBLICANS and TRUMP supporters!

THEY are the ones who are dividing EVERYBODY!"

And someone ELSE could EASILY say:

"I'm a LIBERTARIAN...and I'm in the MIDDLE!

I know it's those blankety-blank Democrats AND Republicans!

THEY are the ones who are dividing everybody!"

WHAT are we to DO?



(pause)

In today's **GOSPEL**...

...JESUS had been teaching his disciples and the crowds that followed him

that true PURITY is a matter of the HEART

--rather than outward religious PRACTICES.

"It's not what goes INTO the mouth that defiles a person..." he said

"...but what comes OUT of the mouth that defiles.

Being pure in life and faith

*is NOT doing the proper things
in order to 'show off' in front of God and other people.*

*Being pure in life and faith
is having our HEARTS in the right place with God."*

And then...almost immediately...Jesus' teaching was TESTED
when a woman considered to be an unclean PAGAN
approached him for help.

(pause)

**G-I.) We DON'T know all the BACKGROUND to the story,
but we KNOW this was a WOMAN who needed HELP.**

We don't know whether she was a GOOD or BAD woman.

We don't know her NAME.

But we CAN observe several things about this woman.

A.] She had already HEARD of Jesus.

When he came to her region of the country...SHE came to HIM.

And she came KNOWING both WHO and WHAT he was!

B.] She came with FAITH.

She had FAITH in Jesus as a HEALER.

She EXPECTED Jesus to heal her daughter!

No DOUBT...or simple HOPE...were expressed by her.

No...she came fully EXPECTING his help.

ALSO...she ADDRESSED Jesus as "*Lord, Son of David*"

--the TITLE for the "*Messiah*"!

Only someone FULL of FAITH would use that title.

Only someone CONVINCED that Jesus was the Messiah
would ADDRESS him using it.

So...this woman came with a HEART full of FAITH
--expecting Jesus...the "*Messiah*"...to HELP her!

C.) She was an "*OUTSIDER*".

She was like the SAMARITAN in the "Good Samaritan" parable.

She was from "*Away*"

--a Canaanite woman from the country to the north of Palestine
...a country hostile to the Jews.

Most people of Israel had been taught
to HATE and DISTRUST anyone OUTSIDE of their own.

Thus...the disciples believed that Jesus' ministry
did NOT include people OUTSIDE of Israel.

"The NERVE of her!" ...they complained.

"She's NOT from OUR house!

She's NOT from ISRAEL!

SO...SEND HER away!" ...they urged Jesus.

Yet...in the FACE of this FRUSTRATION and PREJUDICE
...STILL...in FAITH...the woman CAME!

D.) She was PERSISTENT!

She did NOT accept the disciples' attempts to DISMISS her.

She would NOT be IGNORED.

This foreign woman PERSISTED in SEEKING help from Jesus
until she GOT it.

She did NOT give up...even when TOLD that HELPING her
would be like throwing the family children's food to the DOGS.

*“Yes, Lord...” she replied.
“But even the DOGS eat the crumbs
that fall from the master’s table!”*

Yes...this woman KNEW that Jesus WAS the Messiah.

She KNEW he had the POWER to HEAL.

SO...she was PERSISTENT!

She LOVED her daughter.
--and she would NOT give UP!
(pause)

G-II.) Her persistence PAID OFF!

This persistent outsider...who so boldly came to Jesus for help
in the face of frustration and prejudice
--really IMPRESSED him!

He was AMAZED by the FULLNESS of her FAITH!

In the presence of EVERYBODY...he proclaimed:
*“Great is your faith.
Let it be DONE for you as you wish.”*

And it WAS.
Her daughter was healed INSTANTLY.
(pause)

Now...what does this story have to say to YOU and ME?

I.) It says a LOT about FAITH.

**A.] Jesus spoke to the Canaanite woman a 4-word epitaph:
*“Great is your faith.”***

They are only 4 words...but they are enough to MAKE her IMMORTAL!

Martin Luther's puppy...Tölpel...was at the dinner table one day
looking for a morsel from his master.

The dog watched his master
with open mouth and motionless eyes,

Luther said:

*“Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat!
All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat.
Otherwise, he has no thought, wish, or hope.”*

About this...C. CURTIS GOFORTH writes:

“Martin Luther's puppy reminds me of the woman in today's Gospel lesson.

*Although this woman was a Gentile,
from the region of Tyre and Sidon (modern day Lebanon),
--she couldn't think about anything other
than Jesus healing her daughter.”*

Matthew tells us that she came and KNELT before Jesus.

If the woman was “*down on all fours*”...prostrating herself before Jesus...
--then maybe Jesus' comparing her to a DOG
is not as JARRING as it first seems.

Her posture was indeed “*canine-like*”.

She was willing to give up all her pride to get Jesus' help.

She was like a hungry dog
--begging Jesus for mercy and healing for her daughter.

(pause)

B.] Aren't WE the SAME?

At times...aren't WE that DESPERATE for mercy and healing
--for OURSELVES...or for a LOVED one?

FIGURATIVELY...or LITERALLY...

pain...emptiness...suffering...addiction...heartache...disease...death
--ALL of these are enough to send us to our KNEES!

At times...don't WE find OURSELVES... "*down on all fours*"

--panting...begging...barking for mercy and healing
from the one who is able to do something about it?

(pause)

SURE!

And when we DO...**Jesus wants US to COME to him in FAITH.**

Like the Canaanite woman...

...can WE realize that we DESERVE nothing MORE
than the CRUMBS from OUR master's "*TABLE of GRACE*" ?

"We are beggars; this is true." = Martin Luther's last written words.

Christians are BEGGARS for God's grace.

HOWEVER...even though CRUMBS from God's table would be enough...

--we are offered instead
...the ABUNDANCE of Jesus' own self and Spirit
...in bread and wine!

We are UNDESERVING...but we are given GRACE nonetheless!

And WHEN we COME to Jesus...his RESPONSE to US

--is the SAME as it was for the Canaanite woman:

"Great is your FAITH!

Let it be DONE for you as you wish!"

(pause)

**II.) This story say a LOT about "INSIDERS" ... "OUTSIDERS"...
and PREJUDICE.**

**A.] Rev. DEAN FELDMEYER gives us a very interesting perspective.
He writes:**

*“Throughout our history,
from our earliest days after the first Easter right up to today,
we Christians have been called upon to struggle
with the subject of inclusivity.*

How are we going to treat people who are different from us?”

Feldmeyer CONTINUES:

*“Many biblical scholars believe that this was perhaps
the defining controversy that was affecting Matthew’s church.*

*The massive and brutal suppression of the 70 A.D. Jewish revolt
had sent thousands of refugees ...many of them JEWISH Christians ...
--fleeing north and into the arms of their mostly GENTILE Christian
brothers and sisters in Syria and Asia Minor.*

*How these disparate groups of Christians ...Gentile and Jewish...
would live and worship together ...
would set the course of Christian history for centuries to come.*

Feldmeyer CONCLUDES:

*“Throughout his gospel, Matthew brings us a message
of inclusivity and acceptance of those who are different from us.*

*This week he reaches beyond the comfort zones
of even the most liberal and accepting Christians
with the story of the Canaanite woman.*

*We see that even Jesus had to struggle
to step beyond the prejudices of his culture and his upbringing.”*
(pause)

**B.] Unfortunately...we STILL see this HAPPENING
in OUR culture TODAY!**

As we SAID in OPENING this sermon...DIVISION is EVERYWHERE!
That's no secret to anyone.

And CHURCHES of ALL denominations are not immune.

Some RATHER humorous EXAMPLES:

1.) A **JEWISH** professor of psychology said of his tradition,
*"If there are ten Jewish males in a city, we create a synagogue.
If there are eleven Jewish males,
we start thinking about creating a competing synagogue."* ☺

2.) A **BAPTIST** man had a similar tale....He said,
*"One Baptist family in a neighborhood
witnesses until they bring another family to Christ.
Then they form a church, and start witnessing to the rest of the community.
When another family joins...they have a schism and form a rival church."* ☺

3.) According to a **PRESBYTERIAN** homemaker,
she said her denomination was a little like vegetable soup.
"We have the OPs, RPs, BPs, and Split Peas!" ☺

4.) And a **METHODIST** businessman told about a man from his faith
who had been shipwrecked for years on a small island.

When found by a passing ship...rescuers asked him
why he had constructed 3 huts...since he was there by himself.

*"Well," he replied..."...that one is my home...that one is my church...
... and that one is my former church."* ☺

5.) And we **LUTHERANS**...at TIMES...do the SAME thing! ☺
(pause)

Well...these examples ARE...HUMOROUS.

But they POINT to a DEEPER problem.

--PREJUDICE still LIVES. ☹️

So...how ARE we going to treat people who are DIFFERENT from us?

HOW can we OVERCOME the DIVISIONS...the INEQUALITY...

...the PREJUDICE ...and the PROBLEMS

--that COME with these ATTITUDES?

What are we to DO?

III.) ANSWER = We CONCENTRATE on JESUS!

We LISTEN to him!

We LEARN from him!

We FOLLOW him!

A.] Jesus did NOT allow DIFFERENCES to SEPARATE himself from PEOPLE.

He did NOT do that with the Canaanite woman.

He NEVER does.

In short, he abandons no one.

Jesus took this opportunity as a TEACHING moment.

By...RECEIVING this “outsider”

...by SPEAKING with her

...by LIFTING her UP as an example of FAITH

...and by GRANTING her request and HEALING her daughter

--Jesus TAUGHT his disciples and the crowd God’s attitude.

He SHOWED them ...that she was NOT a “bad” or “defiled” person
just because she came from “outside” their social boundaries.

He SHOWED them ...that GOD’s attitude

is DIFFERENT from the attitudes of the WORLD

--including the racial paradigms and hierarchies THEY were taught.

As one old hymn goes: *“In Christ there is no East or West
In HIM no South or North,
But ONE great FELLOWSHIP of LOVE
Throughout the whole, wide earth.”*

REGARDLESS of whether people are
...black or white – brown or tan
...man or woman – boy or girl
... “in” or “out”
...like us or different from us
--Jesus LOVES and welcomes EVERYBODY
to his Table of Grace!

(pause)

B.] Jesus’ ministry is INCLUSIVE...and SO should OURS be.

We are to CONCENTRATE on JESUS!

--to LISTEN to him!
--to LEARN from him!
--to FOLLOW him!

1.) Some GENERAL IDEAS:

a.] We LISTEN to Jesus ...who never let ANY of these divisions

--come BETWEEN him and people
--STOP him from HELPING people
--HINDER him from HEALING people

b.] We FOLLOW Jesus and never let ANY of these divisions

--come between US and people
--stop US from helping people
--hinder US from healing people
--or KEEP us from BRINGING people to JESUS
who can do ALL of these thing for them...and more!

2.] Some SPECIFIC IDEAS:

a.] Start a conversation with family and church members and ask:

*“What was most important to that Canaanite woman?
...to Jesus?...to the Disciples?”*

b.) When thinking about someone who is DIFFERENT from you...

...ask yourself: *“I wonder...what is most important to him or her?”*

Then ask that person!

And really LISTEN to the ANSWER!

c.) How might our congregation start a conversation

that expands definitions of who WE think is “in” ...and who is “out”?

d.) How might our church better recognize that the circle is wide

and see our “brother” or “sister” in the person we might ...at first...
want to disparage?

e.) Systematic Racism is a learned behavior

and a sin intrinsic within all humanity.

How can we communicate with children and people in our society
about people unlike ourselves

(...in both spoken and unspoken ways...)

--that have a lasting impact on them?

Good QUESTIONS!

Good IDEAS!

Good CHALLENGES!

Good Christian Faith GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES!

(PAUSE)

Well...divisions ARE running RAMPANT today!

--ESPECIALLY in the world of POLITICS.

--DEFINITELY in the world of RACE and NATIONALITY.

Like George Orwell's well known satire "Animal Farm" says:

"All animals are equal.

But some animals are more equal than other animals."

UNFORTUNATELY...many people EXPERIENCE that...even TODAY!

(pause)

THUS...Jesus calls us to be people of real and genuine FAITH
like that Canaanite woman.

* He calls us to PARTICIPATE in his ministry of RECONCILIATION.

* He calls us to PUT ASIDE our PREJUDICES
and welcome EVERYBODY he SENDS to us.

* He calls us to SEE that "*Outsiders*" are ONLY "*outsiders*"
until they come through our DOORS!
--THEN...they become "INSIDERS" !

* And Jesus calls us to WORK together
with Christians of OTHER denominations
...as BROTHERS and SISTERS in the same church = HIS!

(pause)

And THAT's as it SHOULD be!

After all...WE were once "OUTSIDERS" to the Kingdom of God!

Like the Canaanite woman – WE are NOT from ISRAEL!

And because of our SINFUL human NATURE

...once WE were OUTSIDE of our Lord's family.

But JUST as Jesus received HER

...welcoming her FAITH and her WORSHIPPING him as her Lord...

--so ALSO he received US!

EVERY time we COME to him

he RECEIVES us at his Table of Grace!

--EACH and every TIME!

“We ARE beggars...this is TRUE!”

We don't DESERVE God's grace.

But even though CRUMBS from God's TABLE

ARE what we DESERVE

--WE are offered INSTEAD

the ABUNDANCE OF Jesus' own SELF and SPIRIT!

How's THAT for GRACE!

(pause)

And Jesus calls us to PASS his “Grace” ON...

...to EVERYBODY!

T.B.T.G.

AMEN!