

God Loves One and All

August 16, 2020

Matthew 15: 10-28

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

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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."²³ 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."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 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food 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, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Romans 11: 1-2a and 29-32

¹ I 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. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew... ²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.



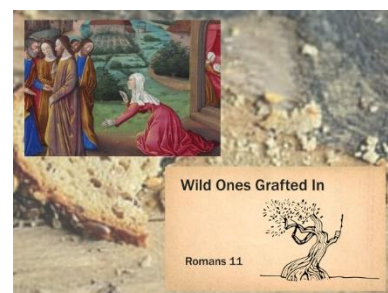
Last week we heard the call to share our story – the story that God guides and works in and through – to help others to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We touched on the idea that for some people, faith can be a

border or barrier, either keeping people “out” or excluded. But, as I shared last week, faith can also be porous, flowing through barriers or around borders as the love of Christ works its way into people’s hearts. This week’s movies are “The Incredibles” – parts 1 and 2. In the first movie we first spend time with a tale of a family of superheroes living in a world that’s made superpowers illegal after some unfortunate incidents and massive amounts of property damage.



As the movie unfolds, the Parr family seeks to balance their “special” powers with making room for others to feel special in their own way. In the sequel, Bob and Helen and family wrestle with what it means to be exceptional as well as how to balance the needs of the self against the needs of the community.

In our first passage for this morning Jesus speaks about what makes us good and righteous. It is not the laws we follow or the food we eat or how we appear on the outside, but what we find in our hearts, in the deepest places within us, that determines our righteousness. He illustrates this through an encounter with an outsider – the Canaanite woman. She passes Jesus’ test and receives his praise for her great faith. In our second passage, Paul shares that God is still seeking to be in relationship with Israel. He reminds them of their past disobedience, a disobedience that led them back to



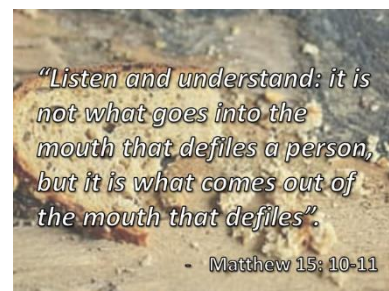
God. In coming back to God, they were reminded that God’s love never fails. This love is evident in the ways that God has grafted in the Gentiles, making them a part of the family of God. Despite the things we do and the things we fail to do, God continues to love one and all. As we begin to delve into this big idea this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer. Let us pray...



Please turn with me to Matthew 15 in your Bible or in a pew Bible or on your phones. We will be working with verses ten through 28 this morning. Our passage today

begins with Jesus making a statement that offends the Pharisees and scribes. They have come to question Jesus about some of the actions of the disciples.

The disciples were eating food without following the ritual purification laws. In the confrontation that begins chapter fifteen, Jesus questions why the religious leaders honor their traditions over the word of God. Jesus quotes Isaiah leading into today's passage, saying, *"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me"*. Then, in today's opening verses, Jesus says to the crowd: *"Listen and understand: 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 immediately point out that Jesus has offended the religious leaders. Now, he might have said this to the crowd, but it was definitely intended for the leaders. Jesus goes on to call the Pharisees *"blind guides of the blind"* – people following the letter of the law but failing to love and care for the lost and needy among them.

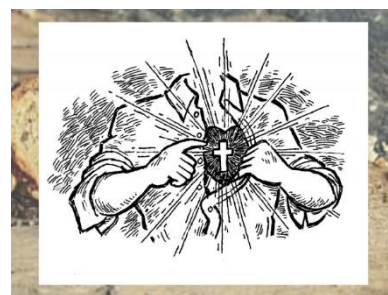


The modern parallel would be the person who comes to church on Sunday, doing what you are "supposed" to do. They sing and pray and listen to the sermon, but they do not apply what they hear about to their lives. This person feels like they have checked off the box. They hear the call to be like Jesus, to love their neighbors, and so on... but they do not even know their neighbor's names. As James said, faith without action is dead. Put another way: if the church never makes an impact on their neighborhood or on the greater community or on the world around them, are they really being the church? The Pharisees were following the rules and checking the boxes. But they were not living out their faith – caring for others, serving the poor, bringing others to God. The temple was much like a social club. Jesus warned that the end destination was the pit. Jesus sought something far more important than gathering in the temple.

Jesus sought inner change – a change in the heart. He was pointing beyond the ceremonial purity that mattered so much to the religious leaders and on to the true inner purity that mattered so much to God. In his own way, he was challenging the religious order. He was elevating a true inner purity over the ceremonial purity of the Pharisees. In today's gospel lesson, ceremonial purity is about what you put into your mouth. True inner purity is about what you allow into your heart. In essence, Jesus is challenging the status quo of his day.

There is also an inner-outer struggle in the Incredibles. For many years they were heroes, fighting crime and keeping people safe. But then public attention shifted and being a "super" became illegal. The Parr family and all other superheroes are forced to live secret lives. The outer world was telling them to be normal – to not be super. But inside of the supers was an inner call to do what they do: fight crime. What was true in their heart was who they were. IN the end, the supers do challenge the status quo and the inner good wins the day. But it is not without a struggle.

Jesus goes on in verses 18 and 19 to share with the disciples that what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. Jesus is saying that our words reveal who we are at our core. The question that came to mind



concerning my words is this: do my words confess that Jesus is Lord or do my words reveal that someone or something else is sitting on the throne of my heart? To extend that idea, do my actions and thoughts reveal Jesus as Lord? Or do they reveal self or some of the things that Jesus lists in verse 19?

Here he lists *"evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander"*. Are these things that take turns sitting on the throne of our heart? The list that Jesus gives the disciples is not all-inclusive. For example, in "The Incredibles 2" it was jealousy and envy that took root in Mr. Incredible's heart as Elastigirl took center stage as she battled Screenslaver and he stayed at home with the kids. When we allow something or someone other than Jesus to reign in our hearts, we venture where Bob ventured – evil thoughts, jealousy, questioning his worth. When we venture there, sin rises up and begins to obscure our walk with Jesus.



Continuing into the second half of our Matthew passage, in verse 22 we meet a Canaanite woman. Ultimately this is the story of how God loves one and all. It takes a while to get there. Being a Canaanite woman, she was seen an outsider, a Gentile, a pagan. When Jesus later refers to her as a *"dog"* he is using a slang word for all non-believers. The Jews saw all non-believers as less than, as inferior, as unworthy of their time. But as she speaks, she belies a faith in Jesus. She begins by saying, *"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David"*. She is identifying Jesus as her Lord, as the Messiah. Her request is for Jesus to heal her daughter. But Jesus ignores her, does not answer her. Apparently, she persists because the disciples say, *"she keeps shouting after us"*. Jesus' initial silence a test of her faith. Then he says, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*. Jesus implies he came for the Jews and she is clearly not a Jew. She persists: *"Lord, help me"*. It is a simple and honest plea for Jesus to heal her daughter.

He counters, *"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"*. Is there not enough of Jesus to go around? Most people, having been ignored and slighted several different ways, would give up and walk away. Jesus is really testing her faith and belief in him.



Driven by the love for her daughter, she sticks with it and she plows right through the barriers that Jesus himself tries to put up, revealing her deep faith. She counters, saying to Jesus, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table"*. Jesus finally acknowledges her great faith and her daughter was healed instantly. She was tested. Jesus, the man who seemingly healed anyone and everyone, slowed played this Canaanite woman. Have you ever felt like Jesus or God was slow playing you? Have you ever felt like God was testing you, withholding an answer to prayer, for example?



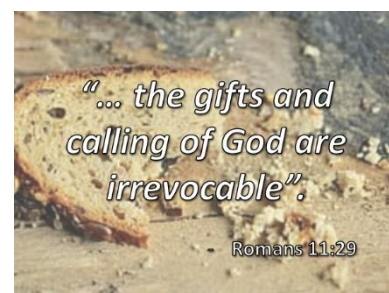
Before we just assume that Jesus was testing her for testing sake, let us remember what came in the first part of the passage. The religious leaders were far more concerned with the appearance of keeping the law or checking the boxes than they were with the inner condition of the peoples' souls. In this second teaching, Jesus draws out the story, demonstrating over and over again the core faith of the woman. Despite insults and barriers being put up, she stuck to her faith and belief that Jesus would heal her daughter.

It is an illustration of the true inner purity – a deep, abiding faith - that drove this woman to Jesus. The interaction and the healing both were ways for Jesus to say that God really does love one and all. The arguments that Jesus puts up for not healing her daughter were the same arguments that the Jews used to keep the Gentiles outside of the family of God.



As we shift to Romans, Paul also takes up the idea of membership in family of God. The apostle Paul very much takes up the idea that God loves one and all. For Paul, that is where our second passage begins. In the

opening two verses Paul writes, *"I 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. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew"*. For Paul, God was still calling out to the Israelites, still longing for them to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. He sees himself as proof of this longing. He continues his argument by emphasizing that *"the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable"*. God chose Israelites before they could do anything to earn their status. The choice was based on God's grace alone. We too experience this. God chooses us just as he chose the Israelites, just as he continues to choose the lost and the broken.



As Paul looks at the Jews, he sees that God is still at work preserving a believing remnant, a group to continue to evangelize the world, including the Jews. Paul connects back to the Israelites' past as a means to show that God can and will

work in their current lives as well – if they are willing. Paul reminds them that they as a nation were disobedient. We are not sure if Paul is referring to the time in slavery in Egypt, to the exile in Babylon, or to one of the many other times when the Israelites were disobedient to God. That does not really matter here. What matters is that in spite of their disobedience, God remained faithful and the gifts and calling remained there for the chosen people.

Paul recognizes here that the new believers, like the church in Rome that he is writing to, are examples of people who have heard of and read of God's mercy and have now claimed it for themselves. The Gentiles once rejected God but have now been added into the family of faith. The Gentile Christians now receive God's mercy just as readily as the Jews could. This was made possible by the Jews' rejection of Jesus and by their ensuing efforts to stamp out the early church. It opened the door, so to speak, to allow the Gentiles into the family. The persecution and violence against the early church pushed the disciples and apostles out into the wider, Gentile world. This, of course, is one example of how God loves one and all. Paul sees the Jews' current status – children of God who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior - as their continuing and current disobedience. Yet Paul believes and encourages the Gentile church to continue sharing the good news with the Jews, with the goal being to bring the Jews into a saving relationship with the Lord and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.



As the modern church, this continues to be our call: to show the world how God does indeed love them. Through Jesus we are called to continue to share the goods new so that all may come to know God's love and to have a saving relationship in Christ. This is not always easy. As Christians, we sometimes feel "special" – like Bob and Helen and Violet and Dash. Our special relationship with God can inhibit our ability to share grace or to be bearers of the good news. For example, when I was still teaching school, I would encounter homeless people and I would think poorly of them. I thought I was a good person who worked hard and did okay in life, so I thought things like, they should just get a job, or they should quit drinking. My self-righteous faith left little room to extend grace and love to those struggling with issues of poverty and homelessness.

In the movie, when Bob was forced to work in the real world, he came to understand non-supers, you know, regular people, so much better. After volunteering at the HOPE Center, I came to understand the struggles of people living lives that were far different than mine. As I got to know them and their stories, I found empathy and understanding, which led to a spirit of generosity and love. It was the beginning of my understanding that I must balance the needs of self with the needs of the larger community. I began to look outside of myself and to see the needs others had. Needs that were far more important than my wants. In last week's movie, we saw this in Miguel's willingness to forsake music for the good of his family. When we develop empathy and compassion for others, we want live lives that support and lift up others. We become willing to give of ourselves and our resources – and our faith – so that others may have improved lives and so that they can come to know God's love.

This morning we were reminded again that God never gave up on the chosen people – the Israelites. God continues to call them into a relationship with Jesus Christ, just as he does all people everywhere. As we consider this truth and as we leave this place, seeking to be God's light and love in the world, may we actively seek to bring that light and love into the darkness and brokenness of the world. May our very lives be a part of the building of the kingdom of God this week. May it be so for me and for each of you. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) Grow. When has disobedience in your life or faith led to you receiving God's mercy and grace? How did this deepen your faith?
- 2) Pray. Jesus lists several struggles in Matthew 15:19. Which resonate with you? What could you add to his list? Pray for the power to overcome.
- 3) Study. Read Matthew 15: 29-31. Why might Jesus heal so openly and freely in this passage after being so hesitant with the Canaanite woman? What might be Matthew's reasoning for adjoining these passages?