

11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 16, 2020

Texts: OT – Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8; NT Matthew 15: 10-20; 21-28

Trinity Lutheran Church, Fairview Village

Pastor Stacey-Kyle Rea

In the name of +Jesus. Amen.

OUTsiders. Nobody wants to be an OUTsider. When you're a kid, style is all about being "IN", not being "OUT." Being part of the "IN" crowd means being "IN" sync with the latest trends. "In the know." We want to be "IN" a relationship with someone, we may even fall "IN" love with someone. When it comes to a good life, we're IN. Being an insider is what we humans desire. Being an OUTsider, well...it's OUT.

Now we've all been on the OUTside looking in. I grew up in Pennsylvania Dutch Country. I am not Pennsylvania Dutch. That makes me a permanent outsider. As a teenager, I remember thinking every adult I knew was OUT of touch. As an adult, I've watched friends and family go "OUT of control." Fall "OUT" of love. WipeOUT their savings. Run OUT of time. OUT is not always popular.

Today's lessons mess with our conventions once again. We watch God turn things INSIDE OUT. Everyone in today's Gospel goes for a tumble. Our Gospel lesson begins with Jesus telling the crowds that purity is not about what goes IN your mouth, but what comes OUT of your mouth. Jewish law is very particular about what is clean and what is unclean. Jesus offends because he says that eating with unwashed hands does not defile – this idea disrespects Jewish laws of purity.

Jesus is trying to tell them that it is not the OUTward appearance of your religious observance that matters...it's what comes OUT from INside your heart. It's the words you say, the actions you take, the love you give. This is what Jesus presents as what makes you pure.

Jesus is now skating on thin ice OUTside the norms of Judaism, particularly for the Pharisees. And so, he goes OUT. Out into the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon. A Jewish man in Gentile territory. He's the OUTsider.

The Canaanite woman, a Gentile, cries out to Jesus. "Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." The woman desperately invites Jesus INto her life, into her daughter's suffering. She cries out for help.

It's hard not to feel this woman's agony.

Her beloved daughter, tormented by a demon. Probably unrecognizable to her at times. What can the Canaanite woman do? She has very little power in her society as a woman, and her daughter has even less. But as a mother, she has a power that no one can ignore. Not even Jesus.

She loves her girl, and won't stand for the word, "No." A mother's instinct to protect her child is fierce. I know many mothers who would die fighting for the lives of their children. The Canaanite woman breaks the rules of ancient society. She approaches not only a man, not only a Jewish man, but Jesus. She is brave and bold, breaking into Jesus' crowd and crying, "Have mercy on me, Lord."

Jesus did not answer her at all.

The disciples want Jesus to send the woman away. Jesus says to them, "I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It feels like Jesus is excluding, which is disconcerting. Is this the Jesus we know?

Yes. This moment reveals so much of Jesus' humanity, as he discerns his calling. He is outside of Israel, in Gentile territory. He has only healed INside Jewish territories, where even still, the people don't recognize him as Messiah. And yet, here is a Gentile woman who sees exactly who he is. His response to this woman was

clearly an important moment for his ministry. Jesus is simply trying to follow God's call. How many times do we pray for God to give us clarity in what we should do?

All becomes clear when the woman bows on her knees, as we kneel to pray. She calls out, "Lord help me!" That's a prayer. A woman, a Gentile woman becomes the first to recognize Jesus as Lord, as the Messiah, she bows down and prays for help.

Jesus responds: It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. To a Jew, a Gentile was about as unclean as a dog. But faith is not about the label of Jew or Greek, man or woman. He's not recognizing her as a child of God. YET.

And then, her final argument: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

The Canaanite woman recognized that even a crumb from our Lord Jesus would be enough. Enough to heal and restore her daughter, to save her life from the demon's grasp. Her faith confronted Jesus in a new way. She faithfully risked her life to save her daughter, honoring and praying to the Lord, the son of David. She saw and acknowledged Jesus' power, and then, she put herself in jeopardy for just the chance of mercy.

And now, we get a glimmer into the mystery of God's heart. God is about to turn Jesus INSIDE OUT, changing the scope and course of his ministry. God is doing a NEW thing in Jesus. This is definitely the Jesus we know, the one we call our friend.

Jesus restores the Canaanite woman's daughter. Commends and stands in awe of her great faith. We see Jesus take on a new role in God's story – one of blessing the outsider. We witness Jesus turning all the rules INSIDE OUT. His attention turns from Israel's most Inner Circle to the ones who remain on the outskirts.

This story feeds into some of our deepest fears, and leaves us with crumbs of doubt. If we get caught up in the questions of why Jesus responds the way he does, we miss the whole point.

We are invited into the life of a mother who is fighting desperately to save her child. She finds and believes there is a powerful one who can help her. She ignores all the societal codes of conduct, just for the chance to save her daughter.

And when we turn that story inside out, we find a God who fights to save beloved children with the ultimate sacrifice: the death of the Son on a cross. A God who fights for all the children: the ones on the inside, the ones suffering on the outside.

We find a Holy One with the power to make us clean and restore us, even when we are disobedient and downright dirty in sin.

Inside out, we find a God who breaks into our world, using ordinary water to make an extraordinary promise to us at baptism; you are a child of God. We can have confidence in God's promises to us; when the world kicks us to the curb with hardly a crumb, God responds by inviting us to an incredible banquet of love, filled with bread and wine and all that we need.

No matter how "outside" God's grace we feel, we get the same response. We find a God who hears our cries, and responds in mercy, over and over again. When we feel like outcasts, we have our friend Jesus, who invites us INTO God's merciful embrace every time we cry, "Lord, have mercy."