

Today's Gospel gives us two seemingly very different, unrelated stories.

In the first part of Chapter 15, Jesus is being hounded by the pharisees about what is clean and unclean. Accusing his disciples of breaking the laws of purity because they do not wash their hands before eating. Jesus replies: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles, but what comes out. What goes into the mouth (food and drink) enters the stomach and goes out of the body into the sewer. It is a passing, a temporary uncleanliness, and not important. And certainly not a defilement. What comes out of the mouth, however, comes from the heart. Evil intentions such as murder, theft, and lies are what truly defile.

I guess he told those pharisees a thing or two.

Matthew tells us that Jesus then travelled from Galilee to Tyre and Sidon - to Gentile territory. There he is approached by a Canaanite woman whose daughter is possessed by a demon. Keep in mind, women don't generally just walk up to men in the culture of the time. Nor do they shout to gain attention. To Jesus, she is an outsider, a Gentile (even though he's in Gentile territory??). Yet this woman is bold enough to speak to Jesus in front of a crowd. She identifies him as "Lord, Son of David." She shouts at him, then kneels at his feet. Truly, she recognizes that Jesus is divine and special. This woman understands that Jesus has the power to heal and there is enough love, mercy and healing power to go around.

Jesus, however, does not respond nicely to her request - basically comparing Gentiles to dogs and telling her that he was here to seek and help the lost sheep of Israel. Wow. Jesus seems to be more fully human than fully divine here.

But the Canaanite woman is persistent and fearless. Even dogs get the crumbs on the floor. I'll take even a little bit of your healing power to help my daughter. And so, Jesus is moved by her faith and he expands his mission,

breaking down more barriers to now include non-Jews. This story symbolizes Jesus' ministry to all the world.

Fast-forward to our world in real time, where we are reminded that God is constantly entering new territory and breaking boundaries. God's work, and the work of the Church, is to meet outsiders - embrace and welcome them - and grant them a place at the table. We must ask ourselves - are we doing that? Our nation's borders are a political hotbed, as are the actions of ICE (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement). What would Jesus do???

We are all God's children. God's love is unconditional and his mercy extends beyond all boundaries. Our response to God's love is to be motivated to love one another, and to be fearless and persistent in our faith.

Amen.

Resources: Sermons that Work: S. Butterworth, Aug. 20, 2017 and S.E. Metz, Aug. 14, 2011