

Matthew 15:10-28

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

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just 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." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15:10-28, 2017

As we approach this passage the first question that may come to mind is,

“Why were these two stories put together for the reading this week,

other than the fact one follows the other in the gospel of Matthew?”

That question may be supported by the fact that, as you can see, verses 10-20 are in brackets, indicating that this section is optional.

And it is hard to see what these stories have to do with one another.

But, we need them both today, and in fact need to include the first 10 verses of chapter 15 in the reading because it all starts there.

The first ten verses of the chapter are about how tradition excludes outsiders,

and how non-conformance of those coming to be a part of something face barriers to entry.

In those verses the Pharisees have complained that Jesus’ disciples don’t wash their hands before they eat which is in violation of the law and defiles them,

gross factor aside.

In response Jesus called the crowd around in the opening verse of our reading.

Now picture that. The crowd turns to Jesus to hear what he has to say and I have to wonder are the Pharisees still there?

How do they take his public correction?

Maybe that is why they take offense, they are embarrassed and humiliated.

So Jesus offers the correction

“¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

From the heart comes evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile, not eating without washing your hands.

That is all pretty good argument, but then Matthew goes on to give us a story to show us how that gets lived out;

the story of the Canaanite woman who is obviously not Jewish and comes from a group of people experiencing great division and hatred with the Jews,

comes to Jesus requesting healing for her daughter who is terrorized by a demon.

In this story we see the struggle of showing mercy to one who is not part of our group, the outsider, the one we may not think is worthy.

Given the history of Jesus' ministry one would not think this would be so difficult.

Throughout the record of Jesus' ministry in the gospel of Matthew Jesus has served the crowds with no indication that there were gatekeepers controlling who was in and who was out.

He began by preaching the Beatitudes to the crowds. He doesn't say Blessed are the Jews who mourn, are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness;

the Jews who are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted for righteousness sake;

but the blessing is for all those he has described as they live in relationship with God.

He says later, "love your enemy." He cleansed the leper – Jew or not, an outcast; heals a Roman Centurion's servant,

many who came to Peter's house, demoniacs and paralytics.

Along the way the Pharisees argue with Jesus about plucking grain to eat on the Sabbath and Jesus responds,

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

When the 5,000 are fed he didn't take role call to see who was deserving and who was Jewish or not.

Feed them!

I'll bet a Gentile or Samaritan or even a Canaanite snuck in there somewhere.

In the first part of our lesson today he says this to the ones who honor tradition over God and the law;

“¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.”

In this second story of our Gospel lesson about the Canaanite woman there seems to be a struggle even in Jesus between the central focus of his mission and mercy asked for.

Jesus came into the world to be the long awaited Messiah for the Jewish people, yes, but also to save the world through them.

It was becoming clear that the only realization of that “through them” part was Jesus’ birth into the people of Israel,

and the calling of his disciples who would carry on his work into the future after his ascension from the Jewish community.

The Jewish people were not all going to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

In the end Jesus grants the mercy requested by this mother for her daughter.

These stories are about the heart. They are about, they reveal the true heart of God;

the true heart of Jesus;

the true heart of the church when it talks like,
when it acts like, when it loves like Jesus.

These stories together reveal the true heart of God alive in you when you welcome the stranger, when you help the needy, when you heal the broken;

when each one of you talks like,

when each one of you acts like,

when each one of you loves like Jesus

So, how do we live in faithfulness, and how do we extend God's hospitality?

First of all we need to recognize that purity, which is where the argument started,

and faithfulness are not measured by the number of perfect attendance badges one earns for Sunday school and worship, but don't quit coming.

They aren't measured by how often you read the bible cover to cover, but don't quit reading.

It isn't measured by how much you give, but please don't quit giving.

We are not going to be perfectly faithful, but our faithfulness is shown by how we faithfully speak and live out the hospitality and love of Jesus.

When I first came here I began saying, and haven't yet stopped saying,

“Any time any person comes on to this campus for any reason, at any time of day on any day of the week, when they leave here they need to know they have been in the presence of God.”

It goes beyond what happens here in this place also.

It happens when you leave here and try to make your way down Dunlawton Ave.

Now there is a challenge for you.

It happens when you go to the grocery store.

You know, some time ago I began to make sure I looked at the cashier's name tag when I go through the line at Publix.

Then when I greet them I can greet them by name.

It does two things:

Reminds me they are a living human being not a machine,

And hopefully helps them feel like a human being rather than a machine simply there to do a job.

Do that and you might make a connection of some sort, or you might just brighten up their day.

No matter how great or small the connection, it is worth the effort. That is the love of Jesus you are sharing along the way.

You can show that love to your family, your friends and the stranger you meet along the way. We can share it here.

Today when we share the peace take it just one step further. Share the peace and love of Christ with one another.

The peace and love of Christ be with you today.