

Year A

Isaiah 56:1,6-8

Psalm 67

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

Proper 15

Good morning everyone

It's always nice to see you all.

I hope the summer is wrapping up well for everyone.

I was checking out of the grocery store this week as a gentleman in front of me was getting his bags. As I turned into lane 12, the gentleman in front of me with black boots, black jeans, a black tee shirt, leather vest and a handlebar mustache right under his sunglasses looked over to me.

And here I am in all black myself. With a little white tab here.

And he looks at me and says

God is good.

All the time.

And he looked at me and said

And all the time.

I said

God is good.

He gave me a nod and a chuckle as he turned to leave.
On the back of his black leather vest were the big letters

Bikers for Christ.

And that small little greeting we shared, is an ancient truth.

St. Augustine phrased it differently, but it was a different time and place.

St. Augustine passed along many critical thoughts that steered the church for generations, but the most important one, in my opinion

Is his idea of The Rule of Love.

The Rule of love says that the ultimate goal of all biblical interpretation, is the building up of the twofold love of God, and neighbor.

The Rule of Love is communicating the same truth behind the proclamation of

“God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good.”

This is the lens by which we need to slowly view this morning’s gospel through.

Because if you’re feeling a sense of discomfort, you are not alone, and it’s understandable.

At first glance, Jesus is not very loving. A first glance it may appear as though Jesus is actually harsh. Exclusive. Gate Keeping as the kids like to say.

I want us to remember that God is good, all the time. As we read scripture we continue to follow the Rule of love.

Jesus teaches the disciples one of the most important lessons to help the disciples see beyond that social constructs that have been placed around them, to see that others are not defiled.

It's not what you put in your mouth that defiles you, Jesus says, it's what comes out.

Because what comes out... comes from your heart.

And if defilement comes from your mouth, then it's truly coming from your heart.

This is a massive shift. This is a big big moment because we're doubling down on the reality that Jesus is here with a completely different understanding of who is in, and who is out.

No longer is it what you eat that makes you undefiled, it's what comes from your heart.

Then. Just then, as Jesus turns to head towards a new place with 12 of his closest friends, just then, this woman comes out.

We've just received this new teaching on defilement and the significance of what comes from the mouth of individuals...

And this woman comes out and says what...

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David" and makes a request on behalf of someone she loves dearly... puts another before herself as she goes before the king of kings.

And Jesus says.... Nothing.

Now there are going to be those who says “well, Jesus is ignoring her.. He says nothing. That’s ignoring someone.”

And any good parent will tell you... that there is a big big difference between ignoring someone, and not responding right away.

And any good teacher will tell you that when there’s a moment to reinforce the lesson you just taught, seize it.

Jesus does not ignore the women. God is good all the time.

Jesus gives the disciples the chance to respond.

And how do they do?

Not well. “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us”

The lesson didn’t stick. They missed it.

If the truth is that it’s what comes out of the mouth that defiles someone...

She said the right thing... she made her request on behalf of another in the name of the Lord. and they missed it.

Not only did they miss it, now who is “defiled”?!

the responses that follow from Jesus, are not for the woman. Jesus is not standing over her with 12 other men behind him badgering a woman begging him for help.

Jesus is responding to the harsh words that came from the hearts of the disciples.

Jesus uses the phrase “dog” here, not because he is verbally accosting her.

Jesus is not a politician. He is not a rouge CEO.

He is the perfect revelation of the divine.

He is the Son of God. Who came to take away the sins of the world.

Jesus uses the word “dog” here, because it’s what individuals who saw themselves as undefiled, would refer to others as. Those who would “defile” themselves.

They’re less than human. Dogs.

I firmly and fully believe that Jesus is more likely using this moment as one to teach the disciples,

that he is being more sarcastic for their attention and education than anything else.

I don’t think Jesus needs his mind changed, I think the disciples do.

Because Jesus is the same one, who is communicating through the prophet Isaiah, trying to teach us before... saying

for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,

Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,

I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

She’s the foreigner and the other... and what’s coming out of her mouth is nothing but faithfulness.

She’s not suggesting that she’s worthy of receiving God’s mercy. She’s suggesting that Jesus is the only one who can help her. She’s not there to debate national identity or politics. She’s not making claims or complaining.

And Jesus is responding by using the common rhetoric of the day to make this a teaching moment for the disciples. And if we had the tone and the body language, if we even knew who he was looking at when he said this, we'd have a more clear picture of what he's trying to communicate and teach in this moment

But what we do have is the knowledge of the loving nature of God.

Our awareness of the truth behind the reality, that God is good, all the time.

So hear me when I tell you, Jesus does not see her as lower than anyone else. And that's the point.

The point is that the mercies of God are for the people of Israel, are for the outcasts of Israel, and even for the foreigner and the other. For the biker in the grocery store and those we don't even know yet.

The mercies of God are for them too.

And if that doesn't exactly seem fair... as the reading may suggest was the common understanding of **that** time...

I put forward for you all today, that it's not.

Is it fair that the man on the cross next to Jesus gets to enter into paradise? Maybe... maybe not.

What I want us all to see and sit with this morning is the same thing the disciples did on the rest of their walk toward the district of Tyre and Sidon

the unfairness of God.

It's not fair, God.

I've been a faithful member of the people of Israel, or of your community of faith.

I've been faithful, and they do things that defile them.

It's not fair to extend to them the same grace, the same mercy, the same love, that you extend to me...

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we all heard it growing up. Life's not fair.

And neither is God.

God is merciful. God is generous and God is forgiving.

And It's the unfairness and the mercifulness that even allows the likes of me

the opportunity to fall to my knees and say forgive me for the things that I have done and the things that I have left undone.

And what the woman knew that I needed to be reminded of, is the basic fact of who our God is.

Merciful. Even to those society has painted and deemed lesser or those who I struggle to love.

Even to those who've had their humanity reduced and stripped from them.

Even those who're different. To the other. To the foreigner. Yes, even them.

It's the same unfairness that leads Jesus to look at the man hanging next to him on the cross, and assures him that there's a space in paradise, even for him.

Life's not fair, friends.

So don't be fair.

Be loving. Be more loving.

Be kinder. Be generous.

Be unfair in the most loving way that you can, because that's who God has been to us.

Amen.