**Gospel**: Matthew 15:10-28

Then 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.

**Message: Mercy Not Sacrifice**

Hospitality in Isaiah’s time was of paramount importance, particularly in those areas of more harsh climates. Travelers were to be welcomed with at least water, if not tea, fruits and bread. This concept evolved into the religious aspect of welcoming, that one may entertain angels unaware. By extension, welcoming wistful souls could lead to an invitation to enter the faith community, becoming followers called to God’s mission and lifestyle. The last chapters of Isaiah are often referred to as Third Isaiah, having been written post-exilic. The returning exiles were facing a much depleted Jerusalem, and the religious leaders (such as they were) were convinced that their downfall had come from not faithfully following all the Law of Moses. Following the Law became more cumbersome than living the spirit of the Law. Nevertheless, welcome and invitation were part of the religious aspect upon the exile’s return.

The metaphor is God comes and dwells among us, literally “pitches a tent” in which all are welcome. That’s a pretty big tent. As humans we like to section that tent to gather with like-minded people or those with similar physical features—someplace where it’s more comfortable and predictable. It doesn’t matter what the organization is, there will be division regarding conditions of membership and purpose of the group. Israelites were also divided as to the extent of welcome into the community. Jerusalem’s population had been seriously depleted and replaced with people from other conquests. Isaiah spoke of welcome, salvation and deliverance. Others became concerned for aspects of foreign cultures being blended/absorbed into Judaism that might be offensive to God, or those (eunuchs) who could not increase the population from within the established ethnicity, and those of physical imperfections of the community. Such became the outcasts. An atmosphere of isolationism took hold of the community. Isaiah threw out a warning against such thinking proclaiming justice and righteousness rather than exclusivism and racial solidarity.

Will humanity ever be in agreement, on the same page, under the same tent? Do you and your spouse agree on everything 100% of the time. Larry and I knew that whenever we agreed on anything, it must be Gospel! Do you agree with your children, or they with you particularly now that they are adults? Do they agree with each other? And, how about with our friends? Probably not, BUT, when we hold fast to the Covenant of loving God and allowing God to love others through us, generating patience and dialogue, the world is a better place. Justice and righteousness combined in simple kindness. Work for mercy not sacrifice.

We choose to push aside the fact that it is the Lord God who calls and gathers, all peoples and all nations. Fredrick Farber (English hymn writer, *Faith of Our Fathers*, and theologian) contrasted humanity’s narrow mindedness by stating, “The love of God is broader than the measure of mans’ [human] mind.” The sacrifice acceptable to God goes beyond the desert hospitality of caring for strangers’ and foreigners’ immediate physical need—food, clothing, a place to rest; the sacrifice is a contrite heart and to be joyful in God’s house knowing you are so loved that you are useful to God, using what you have to give, and to give of that talent generously. We are reminded of God’s generosity toward our waywardness, to reflect on God’s loving kindness showing mercy to others as God has shown mercy to you. This is the true return from exile—from being away from God and now returned to the tent.

Jesus needs some breathing space, since he has upset the Pharisees—again (different corners of the same tent)—and goes into Gentile territory among those considered unclean. The Syro-Phoenician woman, a foreigner, boldly approaches him pleading for her daughter. Why is he silent, seemingly ignoring her? “Send her away”, said the disciples, “she keeps shouting at us.” Yes, she’s annoying, but they still harbor the old ways ingrained in their thinking, what they hold in their hearts. Now it’s coming out of their mouths. Then he acknowledges her presence and implies that she’s a dog. This is so not the Jesus we know. Was this to dramatize the parable? In that moment of silence (indulge my thought process) Jesus knows, and has stated publicly, that he has come for the lost sheep of Israel. How many of those sheep are truly lost? Many? Most? Israel is to be a light to the nations, to be a beacon that calls **all** nations to God, yet as Isaiah warns, Israel has turned inward and become exclusive. This foreign woman recognizes the Light that is Jesus, a healer who can save her daughter, perhaps even recognizing the Light that is the Beacon to **all** nations. She is willing to accept whatever meager crumb he has to offer as she worthily presents her prophetic point of mercy not sacrifice.

Jesus has healed many people. Were all of them faithful Israelites? He has preached, taught and fed large crowds. Were all of them faithful Israelites? He knows the warning from the book of Isaiah. He has led his disciples into Gentile territory, an area considered a toxic waste in Israelite perception. How dare this **woman**, this unclean unwashed **outsider** directly confront this Hebrew holy man!!! Perhaps in this moment of silence, he is allowing his disciples to wallow in their exclusive racial (or ideological) solidarity. *SEND HER AWAY! She’s not one of us*. So, reverse psychology, demonstrating what not to do? This anonymous woman personifies, in her intense encounter with the keepers of **tradition**, the “holy” fence, the barriers and stumbling blocks placed before “all peoples and all nations” that block access to the grace of God.

Religious purity and faithful discipleship do not depend on regular church attendance, or how much is placed in the offering, or how many times one has read through the Bible, or who is allowed to preach the Gospel, or whom you may marry, or how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. According to Jesus, purity and faithfulness are in how the Church speaks and lives out the love of Christ as we show radical hospitality and inclusion to all peoples and all nations who desire a living relationship with God—mercy through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Prayer**: Everlasting God, Comforter of the sad, Strength of those who suffer, Joy of those who are glad, for all who come to You in need and thanksgiving, let our prayers be heard so we may rejoice in finding your mercies present in every moment of our life. We offer our eternal thanks and praise through Jesus the Christ who continues to pray with us, “Our Father . . .”

**Benediction**: The God of Peace make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen

**Old Testament**: Isaiah 56:1-8

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.   6And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant— 7these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. 8Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

**New Testament**: Romans 11:1-32

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

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: You, our gracious God, have given us so much, and we thank you for our being. For all the undertakings you have opened to us wherein we have prospered, for any good we may have done, we are truly grateful. For all the mercies known and unknown, we praise you and give our thanks. Bless these gifts offered today that they may increase and flow out like refreshing water through Jesus the Christ. Amen.