

New Hope Lutheran Church

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August 16, 2020 11th Sunday after Pentecost

ALL EVENTS FOR THE COMING WEEK HAVE BEEN CANCELLED

*Please remember to send in your offering.
We now have a **donate button** on our web site nhlc.ca*

*Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found
on the website.*

*The office is closed, but phone messages, email and mail
are being checked regularly.*

IN OUR PRAYERS

Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha, Derek, Maria and Kai.

Prayer of the Day

God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading Isaiah 56:1, 6 – 8

1 This is what the LORD says: “Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.”

6 “And foreigners who bind 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 without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant— **7** these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” **8** The Sovereign LORD declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”

Psalm 67

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us— **2** so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. **3** May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. **4** May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. **5** May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. **6** The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. **7** May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Second Reading Romans 11:1 – 2, 29 – 32

1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel:

29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. **30** Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, **31** so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. **32** For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Gospel Matthew 15:21 – 28

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. **22** A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” **23** Jesus

did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” **24** He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” **25** The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. **26** He replied, “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.” **27** “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.” **28** Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

August 16, 2020 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost

From the Summer Sermon Series 2020
by Rev. Christie Morrow

I totally feel where the Canaanite woman is coming from. Oh do I feel her anguish and desperation. Any of us who are parents; grandparents; aunts; uncles; friends or who otherwise have children in our lives whom we love deeply, can probably relate to this mother on some level. Her daughter is sick. She will move mountains, transverse long-held boundaries, cross lines, take risks, put herself on the line ... she will do whatever it takes to make her plight known and to get help for her child. I totally get and relate to the Mama-bear in her.

What I don't get ... what pains my heart ... what gives me a whole, healthy dose of internal wrestling, is Jesus' response to her. Over the years, various theologians and commentators and authors have made every effort to try and explain away first his lack of response – he literally ignores her – and then his eventual spelling out that in no uncertain terms is his ministry meant for her ... that her status is akin to that of a dog. A foreign, unworthy, enemy dog.

To try and soften the blow of his words, some have explained that the literal translation of the Greek word “dog” in this case, is actually ‘puppy,’ as if this is somehow better ... when in all actuality, it still leaves her under the table, eating the

crumbs off the floor.^{1 2} And if we're honest, Jesus' eventual response to her is difficult to hear and explain away and not at all reflective of the Jesus that I want tucked close to me.

The truth is, we may never understand what prompted Jesus to say what he did. He and his disciples had wandered into Canaanite territory – the land of a traditional enemy. THEY are the ones that had crossed the line between Jew and Gentile ... one would think they would have EXPECTED to bump up against others who practiced a different faith ... who believed different things. So Jesus, why oh why did you have to go there and say that to this woman who more than anything needed your compassion and care?

There are all kinds of lines being crossed in this story. Jesus is a Jew in Gentile territory; he is deemed 'clean,' she 'unclean; the woman is speaking to a man – emphasizing a gender divide; and she is speaking to someone who ranked higher socially than she did ... Jesus was a rabbi ... someone who had studied and learned. But it would appear as though his learning wasn't over. In his book entitled *A Way Other than Our Own*, Walter Brueggemann puts forth the idea that we are watching Jesus wrestle with his own vocation and the very extent to which he is being called to cross lines in order to help the other. Brueggemann writes:

*the woman is the outsider who instructs the insider. She explains to Jesus his larger vocation that he had not yet embraced ... he learns that full faithfulness means reaching beyond one's comfort zone to the other. He now, in a new way, enacts the gathering of humanity.*³

But what a road to travel to get to this point. Holding a line against another ... being in a position of power and privilege without being totally aware that that's where you're operating from ... being called out; asked to reconsider ... to come to know more in order to do better ... does this sound at all familiar? It should in this day and age.

It was a happy time back in the early 1990s. A family had gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its matriarch and patriarch. There were several activities planned in the weekend

long festivity ... teas, dinners, a mock wedding, a square dance even ... and family pictures. The ENTIRE family had gathered together to celebrate and since they didn't all gather in their entirety very often, you can imagine the boisterous noise of teasing and kibitzing going on. Arranging people for a portrait in this case was probably akin to trying to herd cats. But in arranging the family, the photographer chose to position people along the theme of light and dark ... both clothes and skin. A number of family members are black and biracial and the photographer was essentially emphasizing a visual of the line that existed but had not ever really been named or talked about in an obvious way. And so there everyone stood in a picture now frozen in time ... light on one side and dark on the other.

This family is mine. At the time, I remember my 16-year-old self took note, but I really didn't know how to name what was happening and I didn't know how to stop it. I do now and I continue to learn what this means. When I spoke to my cousins about this sermon and using this story – because it's their story more than it is mine – I had the opportunity to hear their experience of this time and what they remember, and in some cases, the pain they still carry with them. It was a helpful and important conversation to have ... even if it took me 28 more years to finally have it.

And I guess for me, this is another point highlighted in this story. If Jesus can get these hard conversations so wrong, what does that say and mean for the rest of us? It took me way too long to talk to my cousins about this because I felt like I didn't know how and I was afraid. And I think Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman is one that gives some of us pause for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is how we too can screw up these important conversations. If Jesus can get it this wrong with the Canaanite woman ... if he can choose the wrong words ... if he can approach her unaware of what privilege he may carry in that moment ... it doesn't instill in me a lot of confidence that I ... in my own position of comfortable white privilege ... am going to get it right. But silence is no longer an option. We can no longer choose to not to engage in these difficult conversations involving race, gender, and other blatant inequalities because we fear getting it wrong and being

called out on that. Choosing not to is, in fact, condoning and participating in the maintenance of racist and unequal structures and systems that are still so engrained in this world and which threaten the lives and well-being of so many.

On June 10th, Brene Brown on her podcast "Unlocking Us" hosted author, media producer, activist, educator and racial justice advocate, Austin Channing Brown. In their conversation, Channing Brown shared the following thoughts. She said:

*I tell people all the time that the work of anti-racism is the work of becoming a better human ... that's the work ... we're becoming better humans so that we treat other humans better. It's what we're doing here, even though it [can] feel terrible ... but we're also not interested in trying to hurt your feelings. We're not interested in trying to manipulate you; we're not interested in all the things that anti-racism educators get accused of. We are saying, 'I think you have the capacity to be a better human ... would you ... could you accept that invitation?'*⁴

The Canaanite woman was unwilling to walk away from this conversation with Jesus. She pressed on, even though I'm sure his words hurt her, but she pressed on because the life of her child was at stake. And, ultimately, what she offered to Jesus, was an opportunity to expand his ministry to embrace ALL of humanity ... to cross a line in order to offer love and care to ALL people. And for his part, Jesus hung in there, even when the conversation was difficult ... Jesus didn't allow himself to stay stuck where he was ... he didn't storm away when the Canaanite woman challenged him. He is open enough to learn from her – a desperate woman who came from an enemy territory. He allowed her to pull him over the line that had been established by years of social and religious expectation and tradition, and Jesus meets the Canaanite woman where she is at; on her turf. He ultimately heals her daughter from within her own race, culture and country ... no conversion necessary.

This is where God's grace always meets me in this story. Neither Jesus nor the woman remain bound by the lines that

divided them ... the concept of ancient purity ... race, gender, education ... and even though Jesus didn't get the conversation right at the beginning, he stayed for the hard stuff; he was open to being taught and doing better. And the woman, whose desperate and stubborn refusal to see her daughter made well, she didn't give up either. She believed in this man - this preacher, teacher and healer and the love of the God she knew he embodied.

Are we going to get the hard conversations right 100% of the time? Not on your life. Do we still need to engage in these difficult but life-giving conversations? Yes. 100% of the time. Those of us who sit in a position of privilege are called to enter into these conversations in love ... to walk alongside and to be taught, which includes being quiet and listening, but then to also use our voices to advocate for and with others ... to become aware of our privilege and to use it as a means to rise up against injustice. It means being called out when we don't get it right. Just like the Canaanite woman did with Jesus so many years ago.

May it be so with us. AMEN.

¹ Carla Works, "Commentary on Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28," Working Preacher – August 14, 2017, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2145, accessed on June 25, 2020.

² Barbara Kay Lundblad, "Matthew 15:21-28: Teaching Jesus," Huffington Post – August 9, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/on-scripture-matthew-15-teaching-jesus_b_921497, accessed on June 25, 2020.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2016, p 18

⁴ Brene Brown, Podcast, "Brene Brown with Austin Channing Brown on I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World made for Whiteness," brenebrown.com, June 10, 2020, <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-austin-channing-brown-on-im-still-here-black-dignity-in-a-world-made-for-whiteness/>, accessed on July 4, 2020.

Prayers

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Lord, you gather the church to be part of your mission as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As Jesus acknowledged the great faith of a woman from outside his people, help your church discover and find blessing in the faith of people we might reject.

You have blessed us with the bounty of the earth. Grant your grace to all your creatures, that the earth will flourish. Relieve waters choked by garbage, renew soils stripped of nutrients, and refresh the air all creatures need to live.

You call the nations to be glad and sing for joy. Let your way be known among all the nations of the world, now divided by competing interests, contending alliances, and consumed by enormous worry. Bless us and make your face shine upon all.

You show unexpected mercy, kindness, and generosity. We pray for those who do not have enough, for outcasts in our villages, cities, and town, and for those who need your healing.

In you we live and move and have our being. Grant our congregation grace to find our life refreshed in you. Accompany us in the rhythms of late summer. Give us rest and renewal, and strengthen us for mission in your name.

You call us to show compassion to the victims of tragedy. Be with the many who were injured in the recent explosion in Lebanon. Look over all who lost loved ones. Give us generous hearts to assist financially so that aid may arrive to rebuild. May they know your presence near them in this time of massive disruption.

Your other promises are more than we could ever imagine. As you gather all the saints, join us also with them on the great day of your salvation.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**