

Sunday 16 August 2020 Tenth Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Isaiah 56:1. 6-8. Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, 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, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant – these 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. Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

PSALM 67 R *Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.* May God be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of his countenance and come to us. Let your ways be known upon earth, your saving health among all nations. **R** Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth. **R** The earth has brought forth her increase; may God, our own God, give us his blessing. May God give us his blessing, and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him. **R**

SECOND READING Romans 11:1-2a. 29-32. 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. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

GOSPEL (Short or long reading) **Matthew 15:[10-20]. 21-28** [Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

POST COMMUNION God of our pilgrimage, you have willed that the gate of mercy should stand open for those who trust in you: look upon us with your favour that we who follow the path of your will may never wander from the way of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday Homily 16 AUGUST 2020 10th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’”

Matthew 15:28

This story of a Canaanite woman’s encounter with Jesus is not a comfortable one to hear, nor an easy one to understand. It seems out of character for Jesus to reject a distressed woman seeking healing for her child. It is unlike him to use such dismissive words to anyone, humiliating someone in the presence of others.

It might help us in our understanding of it to set this story in context and look at the events which lead up to it.

At the beginning of chapter 15, Matthew tells us that Pharisees and scribes come from Jerusalem to question Jesus. We can be sure these questions are not asked with minds open to a new understanding and deepening of faith. They are challenges thrown at Jesus in order to discredit and condemn him. They ask why Jesus’ disciples don’t follow the traditional Jewish rituals of hand-washing.

Jesus doesn’t answer their question. Instead he launches a ferocious attack on the way they themselves use traditions to undermine the spirit of God’s law. He calls them hypocrites – people who give the appearance of worshipping and honouring God but who in fact put their own interests first, harming others in the process.

These Pharisees, then, accuse Jesus of breaking tradition while Jesus insists that in fact he is the one calling people to live according to God’s laws, not human distortions of it.

After this encounter with his critics Jesus talks to his followers about what makes someone clean or unclean. He explains the teaching in more detail to his disciples who (not for the first or last time) haven’t understood him. Jesus says that food we eat is processed and passes out of the body. It’s a physical function having no moral implications.

However, the way we speak and act does have moral implications affecting ourselves and other people. Our words and deeds can be said to be unclean but they come from our hearts, not from our bodies and diets or the way we eat.

It is after this teaching that Jesus goes to the district of Tyre and Sidon where the Canaanite woman comes to him to beg him to heal her sick daughter. At first Jesus ignores her. Perhaps he is struggling within himself about how to respond. His compassion and love for all suffering people would move him to respond with healing. But he is also aware of his calling as God’s Chosen One from and for God’s chosen people.

As he struggles, the woman continues her cries for help and the disciples suggest that the best way to silence her would be to grant her request. Perhaps partly still talking to himself and perhaps in a questioning way Jesus says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Now the woman comes right up to him, kneels in front of him and again asks for help.

Jesus knows that his critics would reject this woman and would consider Jesus unclean for having spoken to her. He voices their thoughts, saying, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Her quick, witty retort that even the dogs eat what the children don’t want releases the tension and we can perhaps imagine Jesus’ smile and delight in finding such faith in an “outsider” when it had been missing among the “chosen people”. His love and compassion flow freely once more and the daughter is healed.

Jesus demonstrates vividly that while he might be ritually unclean (by speaking to a Gentile woman) his words and actions are loving and healing, reflecting God’s gracious acceptance of all people.

This whole chapter presents us with challenges about how we live out our faith in our homes, congregations, communities and places of work.

We're powerfully reminded that we can say and do all the right things but it's what's going on in our hearts that matters and what is going on in our hearts will always somehow be shown in our lives and relationships. We're reminded that God looks to the very centre of our being but does so with love and compassion, always wanting to forgive and heal so that we can live lives free from guilt and able to love others as we have been loved.

Finally, we are reminded that we, too, are called to love beyond all boundaries, ignoring social niceties and prejudices because no one is ever outside the reach of God's love – which is for all people everywhere and always.