

# August 16, 2020

## Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost



**What comes out of our mouths?**

### ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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*Genesis 45:1-15 -- Psalm 133*

*Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 — Matthew 15:10-28*

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on Psalm 67*

This is a Sabbath dedicated to our God.

Let this gathering place be a home for all people.

**May God be gracious to us and bless us.**

**May God's face shine over all the earth's people.**

Let all the people praise the God of all nations.

Let us give thanks and enjoy the blessings God gives.

**May God grant us understanding and courage.**

**May faith grow beyond our doubts.**

The earth has yielded its blessing.

Let all the ends of the earth revere our Creator.

**God brings us together in unity of purpose.**

**May our circle grow as we welcome newcomers.**

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

How good and pleasant it is, O God, when kindred live together in unity. Draw us now into the community you intend for all your



people. Help us to listen and understand, both your word for us and our sharing with one another. Keep us from being misled by popular acclaim and the wisdom of the marketplace. May we not be unobservant guides to one another but rather be fully open to your gifts and obedient to your call. Come to us now with healing and blessing. Amen.

GOSPEL READING: **Matthew 15:10-28**

<sup>10</sup> Jesus called the crowd near and said to them, “Listen and understand. <sup>11</sup> It’s not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God’s sight. It’s what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you just said?”

<sup>13</sup> Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be pulled up. <sup>14</sup> Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. But if a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch.”

<sup>15</sup> Then Peter spoke up, “Explain this riddle to us.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said, “Don’t you understand yet? <sup>17</sup> Don’t you know that everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer?”

<sup>18</sup> But what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight. <sup>19</sup> Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults.

<sup>20</sup> These contaminate a person in God’s sight. But eating without washing hands doesn’t contaminate in God’s sight.”

<sup>21</sup> From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from those territories came out and shouted, “Show me

mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.” <sup>23</sup> But he didn’t respond to her at all. His disciples came and urged him, “Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us.”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.” But she knelt before him and said, “Lord, help me.”

<sup>26</sup> He replied, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and toss it to dogs.”

<sup>27</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters’ table.”

<sup>28</sup> Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish.” And right then her daughter was healed.

SERMON: **“What comes out of our mouths, defines who we are.”**



At first glance, these two Bible stories may seem unrelated but I did find some parallels. In Matthew 15:1-2 we read the complaint. “Then Pharisees and legal experts came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> “Why are your disciples breaking the elders’ rules handed down to us? They don’t ritually purify their hands by washing before they eat.”

This complaint from the Pharisees seems so petty, but there is a larger issue behind it. This will not be the last time such a challenge is mentioned in the New Testament including in the writings of Paul. Are followers of Jesus required to follow the

Jewish rules? Must a person be Jewish to become a Christian? Can Gentiles follow Jesus or is it “exclusive” to the Jews? After all, Jesus said that he came for the lost children of Israel. That’s what he says to the Canaanite woman who was begging him to help her daughter. She also wants to know if this is an “exclusive” club. Is the good news of the Gospel only for Jews? Does God care about anyone else? Is there a line that must not be crossed?



Jewish culture is being challenged in both these stories. Jewish men are not supposed to speak to women. Jesus has no problem with that when he spoke to the woman at the well. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors and love our enemies. Are non-Jews our enemies?

Jesus gives us a nice parable about loving our neighbors (the Good Samaritan – a gentile) but the parable could also be about loving our supposed enemies. Just look at the characters: the Jewish elite, the man bleeding, the Samaritan who helps.

One of the laws of Moses has to do with not touching blood. That’s a rule that needs to be reformed. Interacting with non-Jewish people is another law from Moses that needs to be reformed. The ritual of washing hands before eating is another rule that needs to be reformed.

That rule misses the point that Jesus is making in today’s scripture story. The more important thing is what comes out of our mouths when we speak.

As we know the words that we speak are connected to what is in our hearts. Don’t talk about rules or laws that have been memorized as children. Do our hearts still think those rules are helpful and relevant or are our words hurtful? Do we speak with compassion or with hate?

If the ancient Jews were taught and probably memorized, all the laws of Moses and the beliefs of their culture, what about us? What were we taught as children about people of color or any other people who are different than us white people? For sure we were taught that we are better than anyone who doesn’t look like us. Is that true? There was a time when Southern Illinois had few people of color and they lived only in places like East St. Louis or Cairo Illinois.

Were we taught that Mexicans are lazy? Were we taught that all Catholic families had lots of children? Were we taught that men didn’t wash dishes or help with the laundry or housecleaning? Were we taught that women could only be nurses, teachers, or secretaries? Were we taught that sending women to college was only a waste of money? They were only going to college to get their MRS. Degree. Were we taught that all gay people are pedophiles and are going to hell?

The list goes on and on; our prejudices and our biases. It's hard to change what we were taught, even if they were untruths.

Just like the people who Jesus met, sometimes their mouth spoke from these things they were taught. The Canaanite woman spoke from her heart. She loved her daughter and she was willing to break rules and knock down walls to help her daughter. Jesus also broke rules and traditions to help her. If Jesus can break rules and traditions to recognize people who were not like him, can we?

Can we write down and make a list of rules or traditions about people not like us and examine each one to see if they are helpful or hurtful? The Pharisees spoke hurtful words. The Canaanite woman spoke words of praise to Jesus and words of love for her daughter. Jesus spoke words of compassion to her.

Can we change the beliefs we were taught concerning others and find the untruths? Before we speak, let's examine our hearts to see if our words are compassionate or hurtful.



#### PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with words from Rev. Thom Schuman  
When we are alone, you make us known to our sisters and brothers. When we are lonely, you whisper, 'come closer,' inviting us into your heart. Great is your love for us, Welcoming God.

When we wander lost and afraid, you take us by the hand, so we may settle in your kingdom. When we hunger for the crumbs of hope which the world offers to us, you feed us with the fullness of your joy. Great is your grace for us, Accepting Christ.

When those around us make clear they want nothing to do with us, ever, you persist in being our friend. When we stand on despair's welfare line, you invite us to come to a sumptuous feast. Great is your hope for us, Embracing Spirit.

Welcoming God, Accepting Christ, Embracing Spirit. You never leave us, and we are grateful.

Today we pray for the people of the United States as we work towards equality and civility for us all. We pray for the healthcare workers and first responders who have put their lives on the line to protect us. We offer special prayers for the families who are dealing with loved ones who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and are not able to visit them in for support. Give strength to the sick and to those who are struggling with separation.

We pray for all those on our prayer list and all those who are heavy in our hearts, yet silent on our lips. Be with us all as we face each day with uncertainty. Yet we are certain that you at our sides continuously. And we are grateful.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. The kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR OFFERING:

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

As you have blessed us, O God, we are eager to share. May we offer more than crumbs from your table. May none be sent away from the blessings you intend for all. We want our offerings to preserve and extend life to your children, here in this place and wherever our influence can reach. What is in the offering plate is only a part of what we dedicate ourselves to do and be that your reign of unity and peace may come. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Now we will go, to serve as God's people.  
We will work to remove all that divides us from others. Now we will go, to share the grace of Jesus.  
We will love others just as we are loved.  
Now we will go, to be the Spirit's community  
In the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST:** Tom Petroff, Ginny Ganschietz, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.

**CONDOLENCES** to Becky Ballard, on the recent death of her brother.

Send cards to Becky Ballard

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