

Sermon
11 Pentecost—Proper 15-A-2
St. Andrew's
August 16, 2020
William Bradbury

Isaiah 56:1,6-8

Psalms 67

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

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

I was part of a Zoom meeting of clergy with our Canon to the Bishop, Bill Parnell, about changes in the reopening protocols, and he said the highlight of his month had been a 30-minute meeting bishops and diocesan staffs had with Dr. Anthony Fauci. He said the good doctor reiterated the three essential practices: wear masks, avoid crowds, and keep your distance, because we are learning that this virus spreads a lot through the air.

Our readings today also want us to wake up to the fact that there are **more than germs floating in the air**. There are also dangerous ideas and beliefs, which we are taking into our minds every time we watch TV, read the paper, go online to Facebook and Twitter or talk to a friend. These ideas, like White supremacy, racism, xenophobia, fiction over science, are bombarding us every day and making us sick.

One belief that's been out there for millennia is that women are in some foundational way inferior to men and therefore called to be subservient to men. This belief has been taken for granted for so long that most never bothered to question it. It was as certain as a sun rise. **Clearly it must be God's will.**

This belief-virus is still floating in the air today as any woman can easily attest. The Me-Too movement has been an attempt to call out this destructive belief system and how it demeans and damages all women. It leads to their abuse at work, at home, and in their own heads, since if you're told often enough that you are an object to be used, you will begin to believe it yourself.

Therefore, parents have to work hard to keep their kids from catching this virus in order to tamp down the rising curve of patriarchy and sexism. If my kids, Katie and Andy are not vigilant in protecting the four grandkids, they would quite naturally grow up believing that girls **are** less and deserve less than boys.

I hope every family will remind their kids that it was just 100 years ago this coming Tuesday that women were granted by men the right to vote in the passage of the 19th amendment. This was a close-run thing, and was opposed not just by men, who stood to lose power, but also by many women who had drunk the Kool-Aid of the status quo of inferiority and subservience. Of course, women of color would have to keep fighting for the right to vote, even up to our current election season.

The gospel today presents a remarkable encounter between Jesus and a woman who is a Canaanite, which means she is a member of the people displaced by Israel over a thousand years before Christ. She is a pagan who worships multiple gods, including fertility gods.

Earlier in the gospel Jesus shows he is willing to listen to a plea from another pagan, this time a Roman Centurion, to heal his servant. But now it's not a man with authority and power, but a woman who has neither. She's a nobody, a nothing, and Jesus ignores her cries to heal her demon possessed daughter. The disciples think she's a nuisance, who needs to be told to shut up and go away.

How many women can relate to this story, who know what it is to be ignored by men who are too important and too busy to bother with them? A trivial example: Stephanie, my wife, who is a priest, tells of a time when men came to inspect the fire alarm system in her church but ignored her, instead addressing a male parishioner as if she were invisible. The fact that she was wearing a clerical collar and was rector could not override the fact that she was not a man.

Jesus and the disciples ignore this poor woman, so she escalates her attack and falls at Jesus' feet, demanding to be seen and heard. "Lord, help me."

Jesus answers, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

The church has tried to find a way to soften the harshness of this verbal assault. Some say, "Jesus is testing her faith", or "Jesus is struggling to stay faithful to his call to preach only to Israel". Others say Jesus is trying to bring her to an appropriate level of humility.

My favorite is the idea that Jesus has a twinkle in his eye as he says out loud what the disciples are thinking, so Jesus can teach them God's new way.

What may be closer to the truth is that we are seeing Jesus in real time struggle to continue his growth as a human being who is also Son of the Father. Remember after 12-year-old Jesus spends time in

the Temple amazing the scribes, Luke says that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" as the King James Bible puts it.

When Jesus says, "The Father and I are One", he is telling the truth, but this is as true at 12 as it is at 33 when he takes his last breath on the cross. **Jesus is listening for the Spirit every moment in order to continue growing in wisdom.** He doesn't show up as a programmed robot, but rather as a human being who listens to the Father's voice instead of to the belief systems of the world. We see this same pattern as Jesus struggles in Gethsemane with his cross-bearing vocation.

Jesus saves his sharpest attacks, not for pagans and prostitutes, but for those who think they are fully grown, who have nothing new to learn. **Those who deny the presence of the Spirit to lead them to see God more clearly, to love God more dearly, to follow God more nearly, day by day.**

The inferiority of women is **one of the devil's oldest lies**, which unfortunately the Church has too often believed. But like he does in his temptations in the desert, Jesus listens not to the lie, but to every word which proceeds from the mouth of God, and he hears God's word when the woman says, **"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."**

Then Jesus answers her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

Notice Jesus doesn't say women who worship false Gods can't have true faith!

Her faith is not something she has created on her own, rather her faith, like yours and mine, is a reflection of the faithfulness of God. She has faith, because she has experienced God's faithfulness flowing through her life.

Our faith likewise grows every time we trust in the faithfulness of Christ, more than we trust in the lies of our culture.

Surely the disciples also get their sexism cracked open as they see Jesus finally engage this woman as a beloved daughter of God.

I think we can draw a straight, though very torturous, line from Jesus' encounter with this woman to Susan B Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, and Ida B. Wells and the countless other women of every color who fought for their God-given equality.

And that line is still moving into the future, so that our task is to realize there is always more we need to learn from the inclusive love of Christ and the radical faithfulness of our God.