

Emmanuel August 16 2020

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

[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 offense 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 left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just 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." 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.

The lesson before today's Gospel tell of the Pharisees, going to Jesus, and asking why his disciples don't wash their hands before eating. Jesus replies, "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."

Today, everywhere in the world, the most important thing we are told is to wash our hands. Literally. Wash our hands to save lives. And a week ago, that very water we wash our hands with, washed away businesses. And more than businesses, it washed away dreams, hopes, foundations, and tried to crush souls. But then, there came family, friends and volunteers. Along with dumpsters, lots of brooms, gloves and trash bags. More importantly the emotional support. Volunteers with the Mennonite Relief group in Harrisonburg helped to hand dig out two basements. Four feet of mud, no machinery, volunteers digging it out by hand. Down at the wharf, torrential water came down the streets, and flooded basements and first floors. And Staunton has responded. Lists of supplies are listed, and then filled in short order. Many people have helped. But there are two I'd like to thank. Emily has been amazing, using her contacts, her passion for Staunton and social media to rally volunteers. Being specific about the needs, so volunteers won't be scared off. And she wouldn't let businesses say they had things under control, she was persistent, to make sure they had help if it was needed. Whether or not they wanted to ask for help. Sarabeth helped for 6 days straight at her friend's business. All day, every day. Both Emily and Sarabeth could easily have been overwhelmed, and decided they couldn't help. But they didn't. They pushed themselves and others. Making sure the business owners knew how much Staunton cared for them. To find out that Emily would use her social network to get volunteers for everyone. As a resident of Staunton, I am thankful for concerned, caring citizens, willing to get dirty, wet, and tired out, to help people they may not know. Many of these businesses had to close their doors because of COVID-19. No sales, no income for several months. For

restaurants, they had full refrigerators of food they could not prepare. They may have been deemed "non-essential". What business or employee wants to be labeled "non-essential"?

Jesus and his disciples labeled the Canaanite woman non-essential. The disciples said **"Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."** She was shouting at them? That is kind of amusing. There have been large crowds of people wanting to be healed by Jesus. But this one woman is shouting at them? And Jesus' answer labels her, he labels her as someone he wasn't sent to heal, someone who is non-essential. She didn't live in the right neighborhood, her people were not the right people. The Canaanite woman would not have cared what they said about her, or how they described her. She had a vital mission. And didn't care what anyone called her, she was not going to let anyone get in her way. Because for her, she was a mother. A mother with a daughter who needed Jesus' healing touch. Call her courageous, assertive, aggressive, or that she persisted. She would do anything to catch Jesus' attention. Even kneel before him, and simply say "Lord, help me." Those are words many of us have prayed, "Lord, help me." And even then, he once more dismissed her. To say not only was her need not as great, but if he healed her maybe there wouldn't be enough of him to heal all those in the house of Israel. This persistent, anonymous, unclean woman got his attention, because this mother had the determination, the guts to debate Jesus. To call him out, to challenge his indifference to her. To simply say, everyone has the right to be healed by you. You should not be choosing between people. Her audacity was rewarded. Jesus acknowledged her faith, and healed her daughter. How many people would have given up. Been devastated that they were not worthy of Jesus' healing. What if tonight when we prayed, "Lord, help me" we received a text that said not available. Or the stars spelled out "NO."

The first part of our reading, Jesus acknowledges that a persons' words are important. Their words come from the heart. Just as the Canaanite woman's words, her request came from the core of her being. She was not asking anything for herself, but for her daughter.

The universe is not trying to break you, my dear, it's trying to find a way to wake you up, so that you will see what is real, and worth fighting for. It takes time to heal, but it also takes courage.

I found this attributed to three different people, so I will say, author unknown

Amen.