

August 16, 2020 Sermon
Matthew 15:10-28

Matthew 15:10-28 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁰ Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹² Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" ¹³ He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.^[a] And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶ Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸ *But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.* ¹⁹ *For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.* ²⁰ *These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."*

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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." ²³ 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." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (This is the gospel of the Lord, thanks be to God.)

More than a *few* things came to mind as I was preparing this sermon. *First* of all, the whole unwashed hands thing caused an ironic giggle to bubble up from deep within my soul. All we've heard for the last seven or eight months is how we should wash our hands, and even THAT is waning a bit. And my thoughts have ALWAYS been, "hmmm...washing our hands *shouldn't* be anything new," and yet, it was presented to us as a *whole* new ballgame.

My brain even took me to those signs in the restrooms in eating establishments that say "Employees MUST wash hands before leaving the restroom!" Was that a reminder to THEM? Was it to let US know that the management was at least TRYING to get their cleanliness point across? Who really knows, but in the case of today's lesson, eating with unwashed hands does *not* defile.

What DOES defile, though, is that which comes out of our mouths. *Because*, says Jesus, what comes out of our mouths, comes from our hearts, because our hearts are filled with evil intentions. Those evil intentions include things like *murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander*. Even though we, who read this, would love to think we are *not* a part of this defilement, well...we are. (probably, and even hopefully not the murder part, but souls and lives can be shattered by false witness and slander) And it seems kind of *harsh*, but *maybe* we need to be hit with harsh realities, sometimes.

We can name any number of events that we have witnessed on the news or even in person, lately, and we have *probably* had defilement come from our mouths. Even if you didn't say it, please remember that God *knows* our *every* thought, and since defilement originates in our hearts, God *knows* it's there.

Having said that, God *also* knows we're human and that things are going to happen, and so we can, in all sincerity, ask forgiveness and know, because we have faith in God in Christ, that we will be forgiven. But wouldn't it be great if we could just *stop* our hearts from *judging* and our *mouth* from *moving* so we wouldn't cause such defilement?

The next couple of things that came to mind when I was reading these verses of scripture, and *especially* the part about the Canaanite woman, were the phrases, "Nevertheless she persisted," and "Well-behaved women seldom make history."

The Canaanite woman both persisted AND made history. If she hadn't made history, we would not hear of the Canaanite woman in Matthew's gospel.

Jesus left the place where he was (remember, he had been teaching and healing the group of over five thousand people) and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. This *was not* a spot where Jesus was all that well-received when performing miracles, and yet here he was.

The Canaanite woman started shouting and more than likely was causing a disturbance and getting a notice from those who were in the immediate area. She speaks to Jesus as others do, who may know of Jesus' mercy a little *more* than she does. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David," she says. "My daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus does not answer.

The Canaanite woman keeps shouting and begging for healing mercies for her daughter, and rather than ask Jesus to help her so she'll move along, the disciples say to him, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." (Persistent, isn't she?)

And Jesus responds with, "I was sent *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." As in, "Sorry, lady, but you're *not* my kind and I can't be bothered with the likes of *you*." But she pushes...and maybe she sees something in Jesus that maybe *he* didn't even *see* in himself. Maybe, for a fleeting moment, she *knew* that Jesus' kingdom could go further than even HE imagined, and so she continues to go *after* him and cries out (just like Peter did when he was about to sink into the waves) "Lord, help me!"

Then Jesus says something that, to me, is *completely* out of character for his reputation as a kind and loving man. He responds to her by saying, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Did he just say to her that she wasn't worthy of *anything* he could offer? Did he just *imply* that any blessings being offered were for Israel *only*, and to share them with her would be a mismanagement and a misappropriation of those *blessings*? Did he just call her a dog? What about watching what comes from our mouths as a defilement?

Those words from Jesus most likely would have stopped me dead in my tracks, and yet *she* pushed on as she replied to Jesus by saying, “Yes, Lord, yet even the *dogs* eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” It took a lot of gumption for a woman of that time, to talk back to a man. (What is that saying about well-behaved women?) Can you imagine the looks on the faces of Jesus’ disciples as this conversation was taking place? They had to be simply *astounded* by this woman!

And how *brave* is this woman to ask for mercy for her daughter when the *daughter* is *not* even there? Most people might think Jesus would need to see the daughter; maybe to prove that the daughter was actually possessed by a demon. Jesus doesn’t even *ask* where she is. Instead, after this heated exchange, Jesus says, “Woman, *great* is your *faith*! Let it be done as you wish.” Jesus did not say she was healed, and we are shown no proof, other than the fact that Matthew *tells* us the daughter was healed *instantly*.

The news is *flooded*, lately, of people in line. There are people who wait in line for groceries from charitable groups, because they have a shortage of funding due to the virus. There are people waiting in line for *testing* of the virus. There are lines that lead for, what seems like miles, from the door of the unemployment office because so many people are out of work right now. And there are words of defilement coming from the mouths of people that surprise us!

By words of defilement, I mean words that *judge* and *hurt*. Words that say, this person and that person do not deserve this because of one thing or another. I know so many people who will be hurting without added assistance to the unemployment they are already receiving, because they have been without work for so long. Those people who *need* extra assistance are *also* people who WANT to go back to work, and yet we *hear* defilement and judgment from others who are not *wearing* the shoes of those people.

People are being *persistent* in voicing their needs, whether they are women or not. People are being persistent in finding funding and food for those who need help during this rough time. People are being persistent in getting *tested* when they feel it is needed and of all these people who are being persistent, *they* have *faith* that everything is going to eventually be okay. If they *didn’t* have faith, they wouldn’t persist in standing in all these lines.

Persistence and faith make a fabulous duo. Faith may have something to do with continued persistence. Being persistent may mean that we are filled with faith, and that *faith* is enough to carry us through the tough times.

Jesus doesn't *always* come through for us in a way that we would like him to. Jesus doesn't *always* come through with the *answers* we would like. Jesus doesn't *always* conform to what we *hope* for. He surprised us with his pre-healing banter with the Canaanite woman, but because of her faith and her persistence, Jesus did what was asked of him.

If we are *truly* disciples of Jesus, then we must *persist* and have *faith*. We must be *willing* to put ourselves in the shoes of others. We must be *willing* to show *compassion* for those who do not look like us, or dress like us, or even talk like us. We must be *willing* to be *persistent* in our prayers, and have *faith* that God in Christ will be with us and *all* people in times of need. Remember...God so loved the WORLD. God *is* with us in this *moment*, in this *time*, in this *day*. God *loves* and shows mercy to *all* in our persistence and our faith. Amen.