

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Psalms 67

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28

08/20/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

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.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

What Now?

Good morning! For most of my sermons I have an agenda. I have a specific thesis that I am trying to communicate and hopefully by the end of the sermon you will have gotten a rough idea of what that was supposed to be. But for this sermon it's a little different, instead I want us to imagine, to dream, and see what the Spirit causes to bubbles up. In an ongoing theme, we'll turn our attention to the First Lesson from Isaiah in the First Testament. But this week we'll sneak in some thoughts from the Gospel lesson in Matthew too.

The book of Isaiah is roughly broken up into three sections. These have creatively been named Isaiah 1, Isaiah, 2, and Isaiah 3. You won't see any points delineating these sections, but scholars have been able to notice three different time periods from which the book was written. Now, scholars like to get into arguments over the different sections, but they are ROUGHLY split this way: First Isaiah covers chapters 1-39 and is the "original" Isaiah. This section covers the history and warnings from the prophet leading up to the Babylonian Exile in 587 B.C.E. This was when the Babylonian army conquered all of the country, destroyed the first temple that had been constructed during Solomon's reign and then hauled off a bunch of prisoners. Second Isaiah covers chapters 40-55 and is equally part sad and fascinating. During this time the Israelites wrestle with what it means to be a people outside God's chosen land. They ask questions like is God only the God of Israel? How can God exist when the temple, God's home on earth, had been destroyed? They lament and ask why they were carted off to Babylon. Third Isaiah is written by another "Isaiah" and covers chapters 56-66, which is where our First Lesson comes from. It takes place roughly 50 years after the Diaspora, the name for the Babylonian Exile. In it the Israelites are set free and allowed to return to Jerusalem. But since only

the most powerful and wealthy were carted off, “the Israelites” are forced to come to grips with some new realities. The first is that while these politically important prisoners were away Israelites were still living in the holy land and holy city. The newcomers don’t trust those that were left behind and the group that had survived doesn’t trust these newcomers who have intermingled with people who were not “true Israelites.” In the midst of this struggle they come together in an attempt to rebuild the Temple.

It’s easy to glamorize the struggle that was undertaken and point to the wonderful work that was accomplished, but this diminishes the very real hardships that would have been undertaken. People are messy, and that means we often do and say things that make progress move at the pace of a crawl. One scholar writes that: *“Today, we often expect welcoming the stranger to feel good, to be rewarding and connect us to one another. We have sentimentalized notions of warmth and ease with one another. We put out banners that say, “All Are Welcome!” with cozy visions of new members who fold in seamlessly into who we already are. We are surprised and disheartened when welcoming the stranger is disruptive, awkward or difficult. Most scriptural teaching on welcome teaches us this: strangers often bring God’s own message, coming in to disrupt and transform. Strangers bring strange practices, strange worldviews and strange expectations. We are often surprised that strangers are strange!”*¹

Which brings us to the Gospel lesson. In it Jesus also comes to grips with the difference of a stranger. The woman whose faith is great comes from Israel’s oldest enemy! The Canaanites! And from her we learn that clearly God is at work in a strange and different way.

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20/commentary-on-isaiah-561-6-8-6>

Which brings me to my point at the beginning of the sermon. I don't know where, what, or how God is calling both the larger Church and the congregation of St. Paul's. In the past 4 years ministry has changed drastically, and congregations around the world are wrestling with what it means to be God's people in a new reality. The good news is that God is used to this sort of change, it's us human beings that seem to get caught up. So I want to spend 5-10 minutes answering a few questions that you can put in the offering plate. So... what's next? Amen.