

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 offence 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.

Jesus is at it again. In the Gospel today we see that he went on the wrong side of the tracks ... where the outcasts live. The people who the Jewish law proclaimed unclean – undesirables. We had a hint that Jesus was going to step on the toes of the religious gatekeepers in the first part of the Gospel where he said that it is not foods or the way you wash your hands that are a

problem, which was the focus of the Jewish religious purity laws. No, Jesus says, the problem is what comes out of our mouths, not the food that goes in. He stated:

“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.”

For Jesus, what comes out of our mouths make us unclean. We see this today in all the racial conflict. Harsh words coming out of mouths that are meant to hurt and demean people are the problem.

It is amazing how we humans can create conflict. I found this as a young child while growing up in ND. I had two other friends in the neighborhood – David and Jimmy. We hung around a lot together and normally things were harmonious. But at times there was conflict between the three of us. David and I would decide we didn't like Jimmy. Or Jimmy and David would decide they didn't like me. Or David and I would be against Jimmy. It was painful thing for the one on the outside. They are called triangles – two against one and you can find them in in office buildings and all walks of life.

I saw the same thing in the seminary. Three of us arrived in Maryland from ND – Brian, Gary and myself. We were quite a sight when we pulled up. All three packed into my volkswagon dasher. We lost the muffler a few hundred miles from the seminary and came roaring in to Emmitsburg Maryland – three country boys from the plains of ND. We were good friends but there again, in the seminary was the triangle. Not only between us but others as well. A few years after ordination, I was asked to conduct a retreat from seminarians in ND ...

The Canaanite woman in today's reading was the one on the outside, but in this case her problem was not just her, it was her race and ethnicity. She was a Canaanite from the foreign soil of Tyre and Sidon and not from Israel.

A racial slur was even used, she was called a dog. –But all ended well. The woman persisted in demanding mercy from Jesus for her daughter. And here is the good news of the Gospel: Jesus stepped across the racial barrier and drew the circle of inclusion larger to include her and her daughter as he extended healing. This larger circle drawing of Jesus is on most every page of the four Gospels.

Jesus can do nothing else. His default is love, mercy and compassion. He is a man of Grace and it was what his life was and is all about.

Grace is central to Lutheranism and something worth focusing on during this 500 anniversary of the Reformation.

Grace is uncivilized and rebellious. We make rules for it and it breaks them. Grace is a constant embarrassment to the prim and proper religiosity of the squeaky clean.

Grace doesn't tiptoe around puddles in its shiny new shoes but slogs ankle deep through the stinking muck of the pigpen to raise up the poor souls who've tripped over temptation and face-planted themselves in the rotting mud.

It doesn't hire Private Eyes to sniff out the backstories of potential recipients to ensure there are no sins that might disqualify people from full acceptance. No, grace walks through alleys and divorce courts and rehab facilities and prisons to press into unworthy hands an invitation to live for free under God's roof.

Grace doesn't sit cross-armed behind its desk and tsk-tsk you from across the room when you blush to confess your darkest secrets. Rather, it wraps its arms around your shaking body and lets your tears and snot drench its shoulder as it whispers, "I love you. I forgive you. You are mine."

Grace is lacking in taste and good manners. The same loving lips that kiss away the tears of a repentant whore will turn right around and kiss the lips of a humble queen. The same hands that scrub the vomit out of the clothes of a drunk will shake hands with the teetotaler. It's never learned the difference between a shack and a mansion. Grace doesn't consider the color of one's skin whether or not forgiveness should be granted.

Grace could care less whether you're a high school dropout or a Ph.D., a felon or a cop, a virgin or a porn star. All are guilty of leading lives of rebellion. All are equally dead in transgressions and sins.

Yet there stands Grace, the anti-Santa Claus, doling out gifts to bad boys and girls. It throws open its door and hollers, "Come one, come all. Fools and wise men, penniless and powerful, Pharisees and publicans. You've all got a seat at my table."

Grace is karma's worst nightmare: we get the opposite of what we deserve.

Grace is the God who was born in a barn, swaddled in rags in the cold darkness of the world.

Grace is the God with such poor taste in friends that his detractors labeled him a glutton and a drunkard and a sidekick of sinners.

Grace is the God who loved them all, loved them unto death, even death on a cross.

Grace reigns triumphant in the scarred but resurrected body of Jesus Christ. That grace is yours. And that's the grace we are called to extend to others.

Amen.