

TEXT: Isaiah 56:1-8; Matthew 15:21-28  
THEME: Woman, great is your faith!  
SUBJECT: Justice  
TITLE: The Master's Table

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
16 August 2020  
Messiah Moravian  
Jerry Harris

When Caryn Schouten of Sioux Center, Iowa, hears talk of giving freedoms to gay people and members of minority groups, she feels like her freedoms are being taken away and that she is being turned into the minority. "Caucasian-Americans are becoming a minority. Rapidly."

Caryn continued, "We are picking and choosing who matters and who doesn't. They say they are being picked on, when we all are being picked on in one shape or form. We are making this huge issue of white versus Black, Black Lives Matter. All lives matter."

As legendary Alabama football coach Nick Saban put it in a video to his football team, "All lives can't matter until black lives matter." This so enraged Mark Chambers that he resigned as Mayor of Carbon Hill, Alabama, saying "I got several Alabama pictures for sale Nick Saban and the Tide is done in my opinion."

The calculation about who matters, who matters more, who matters most, has a long history. When a nameless Canaanite woman, a single mother of a very ill daughter, asks Jesus for help, he responds—after the silent treatment does not get rid of her—"I was sent only to the children of Israel."

Canaanite's occupied the "promised land" like Palestinians occupied Palestine prior to 1948, like Native Americans occupied North America prior to the arrival of Columbus. The promised land was "given" to the slaves escaping Egypt like Palestine was given to the Jews by the UN's "Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel," like this land was "given"—under the banner of "manifest destiny"—to European refugees.

As the story goes, the slaves escaping Egypt were commanded to drive the Canaanites out of the promised land. Moreover, this conquest was not meant to displace the Canaanites; it was intended to kill the Canaanites. Not one man, woman or child was to remain alive. A thousand years of animosity between Canaanites and Jews frame the encounter between a desperate mother and Jesus.

As William Faulkner knew, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (*Requiem for a Nun*). Just ask the Palestinians displaced to create the state of Israel. Ask the Native Americans placed on "reservations." Ask the Blacks "displaced" from Africa and "placed" here.

The disciples, like their ancestors, wanted the Canaanite woman gone, out of their hair. She refuses to leave. She is fighting for health care for her daughter who lives in daily torment. She endures rude disciples and dismissive, demeaning treatment from Jesus. Is this the same Jesus

who just fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish, who now declares there isn't enough "bread" for this Canaanite mother? The issue, it appears, is not resources but race!

It seems, as much as Jesus loved the prophet Isaiah, loved to quote Isaiah, he missed the reading from Isaiah for today. Isaiah believes God's salvation comes when we do what is right. Doing what is right, according to Isaiah, is guaranteeing justice for eunuchs who were declared to be, according to Leviticus, outside the protection of the law. Doing what is right, according to Isaiah, is guaranteeing justice for foreigners. Isaiah is a universalist. "My house (God's house) shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Today the Moravian Church celebrates the August Thirteenth Festival. It is a commemoration of a community created out of diverse groups, outcasts and foreigners from Bohemia and Moravia, who were given refuge on the estate of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf at Herrnhut, Saxony. Some of these refugees were Reformed, some Lutheran, some Catholic, some Separatists, some Gichtelian (a sect that condemned marriage and church services).

Doctrinal differences created tensions between the Reformed and the Lutherans. Some refugees believed the end was near. Conflicts erupted over whether a plain wafer should be used for communion or one with a Lamb or crucifix stamped on it. Was general confession sufficient or should private confession to the pastor be the norm? Zinzendorf was called the antichrist and the Lutheran pastor in the local village, Berthelsdorf, was called "the beast from hell." Families were divided.

These folk took their differences seriously. Christian David, one of the refugees, observed "It is truly a miracle that out of so many kinds and sects and the like, we could be melted together into one." The August Thirteenth Festival is celebrated with Holy Communion and in many places with a Lovefeast. In both cases it is celebrated with bread shared.

Thomas Cahill concludes his book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, by comparing the fall of Rome with the challenges facing the United States. He writes, "Rome's demise instructs us in what inevitably happens when impoverished and rapidly expanding populations, whose ways and values are only dimly understood, press up against a rich and ordered society.

"Perhaps history is always divided into Romans and universalists. The Romans are the rich and powerful who run things their way and must always accrue more and more because they instinctively believe that there will never be enough to go around; the universalists, as their name implies, instinctively believe that all humanity makes one family, that every human being is an equal child of God, and that God will provide.

"The twenty-first century, prophesied André Malraux, will be spiritual or it will not be. If *we* are to be saved, it will not be by Romans but by saints."

The Canaanite woman outwits Jesus. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” We need to pause and listen carefully—their **master’s** table! The August Thirteenth Festival is, in part, a celebration of the master’s table becoming the community’s table, the communion table. The “master” becomes the servant of all. The Canaanites, the eunuchs, the foreigners have a place at the table. They no longer need to be satisfied, like the dogs, with crumbs, with left-overs. There is enough for everyone!

Jesus answered, “Woman, great is your faith!” This is the only time in the gospel someone is said to have “great faith.” This must be read in contrast with the preceding story when Jesus says to Peter, “You of little faith, why did you waver?” The privileged, the insider, the disciple, the man, has little faith while the despised, the outcast, the pagan, the woman, has great faith. What is Matthew telling us?

“Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. It will take great faith to heal the earth. It will take great faith to overcome the prejudices of the “Romans” who believe their privilege is a sign of God’s grace. The earth is a story formed creation. If stories of fear and prejudice, if assumptions of scarcity, are allowed to shape our life together the earth will remain tormented by demons.

We will be healed when God has gathered all the outcasts, when there are no refugees. We will be healed when the universalist dream is embraced by you and me. We will be healed when God’s house—the earth—is a house of prayer for all peoples!

PRAYER: by J. Philip Newell

That truth has been inscribed into our hearts  
and into the heart of every human being,  
there to be read and revered,  
thanks be to you, O God.

That there are ways of seeing  
and sensitivities of knowing  
hidden deep in the palace of the soul,  
waiting to be discovered,  
ready to be set free,  
thanks be to you.

Open our senses to wisdom’s inner promptings  
that we may give voice to what we hear in our souls  
and be changed for the healing of the world,  
that we may listen for truth in every living soul  
and be changed for the well-being of the world.