

I will with God's help

[Isaiah 56:1,6-8](#)

[Psalms 67](#)

[Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32](#)

[Matthew 15: \(10-20\), 21-28](#)

I think there's a little bit of Jewish privilege showing up in today's gospel and in the second reading. Paul proudly shares his Jewish credentials, and Jesus says "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Privilege is an interesting thing because most of us have ways in which we are privileged in our society and ways in which we are disadvantaged or even oppressed. For example, I am extraordinarily privileged to live in this beautiful place where we have clean air and plenty of fresh produce, I am privileged to have lived in a time of peace and prosperity, to be highly educated and have a relatively secure and satisfying job. And of course I am white. On the other hand, I am a woman and I am a lesbian. I am also an immigrant which means that even though I have lived here half my life there are still many cultural allusions I don't know, and jokes I don't get which leaves me slightly socially disadvantaged. I am also a grey-haired senior and find myself being talked down to by young men in tech stores.

I am sure that if you think about yourself you will find that there are many ways in which you are privileged and some in which you are disadvantaged.

For the Canaanite woman, as for many of our Black, brown and indigenous neighbors, her disadvantages far outweighed the privileges. As a woman and a Gentile she was close to the bottom of the pile. It must have taken extraordinary courage to bother Jesus, the famous Jewish rabbi. Yet her love for her daughter and her desperation were so great that she bucked social convention and cast caution to the wind.

Jesus seems to have been on vacation or at least taking a side trip out of his normal country. The region of Tyre and Sidon was Gentile land. He can't have been surprised to have been accosted by a Gentile woman, even though to talk with her was to render himself ritually impure. But apparently, he was not expecting to do any healing on this trip. Because he thought that his ministry was just for Jews.

From our perspective that's pretty staggering. One of the dominant themes of the Acts of the Apostles and of Paul's letters is how the gospel of Christ and the love of God is not just for the people of Israel but for all people. This is a trajectory which was opened up by the prophets – we hear a hint of it in that first reading from Isaiah, "Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered." Most of us would not be gathered this morning were it not for our knowledge that God's love is for all people regardless of cultural or ethnic background.

But apparently Jesus didn't know that yet. He was a man of his time with many of the blind spots of his culture. And in this gospel reading, Jesus has a conversion moment. A major

“Aha.” He realizes, because of the courage of this one woman, that his ministry is not limited to Jews but can extend to others as well. It’s probably a reach to think that he changed his mind and immediately realized that he had been sent for the healing of the whole world. But the seed had been sown.

Isn’t that how change happens? Something changes in our minds, at first it’s something small, and then we begin to notice other things that confirm that original change. That’s the way the Holy Spirit tends to work in our hearts and minds, with small incremental steps. Little inklings that grow into big convictions.

I have been having a change of mind about this county of San Luis Obispo. I have always thought of it as an open place with people who want the common good and are tolerant of their neighbors. A place where law enforcement could be trusted. A place where racist ignorance had no place. But over the past few months I have had a change of heart. It probably started a couple of years ago when Pat Henry was verbally assaulted on the beach. A big change came when SLO police used tear gas to break up a demonstration and now with charges being brought against a young Black woman for leading a demonstration that got a little out of hand, I have realized that although it is a safe place for me, it isn’t for many people. And if it isn’t for them, then it isn’t for me.

And it’s not ok.

Our first lesson this morning started, “Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right.” Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right.

People of God, that is our calling, that is our charge. The law and the prophets are all about maintaining justice and doing what is right, and Jesus lived that out – not justice in the legal system but the kind of justice which ensures that all people are equal and all people are treated with respect. He showed us that way to live by hanging out with prostitutes and tax-collectors, by healing beggars and the Canaanite woman’s daughter. And it probably didn’t stop there – I bet that within an hour of that healing there were hundreds of other Gentiles from the region of Tyre and Sidon calling for his help.

Justice is right there in our baptismal vows.. “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” and all the people say “I will with God’s help” and “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? And all the people say “I will, with God’s help.”

We are the ones whom God has put in this county at this time. We are the ones who are called to maintain justice and do what is right. And we have vowed to do just that.

And as Paul declares, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” – God has not changed God’s mind about calling us.

I don’t know what it’s going to take to create a society where Latinex, Black, Asian and Chumash people have equal respect and equal rights; and where people can protest

peacefully without fear of heavy-handed law enforcement action. But I know that that is what God's reign looks like. And I know that our vocation is to work for the extension of God's reign. Not just in our privileged households but out on the streets too.

I don't know what it's going to take to create a society where everyone has enough food – here in this food-rich county 46,000 people don't always know where their next meal is coming from – what it's going to take to create a society where everyone has enough food, a roof over their heads and some way to contribute. But I know that that is what God's reign looks like.

I don't know what it's going to take to create a society where people care so much about their environment that we stop putting carbon and methane and other gases into the air, where we stop creating enormous amounts of trash, where the resources of the planet are shared equally among nations, and there are no more environmental ghettos. But I know that that is what God's reign looks like.

The Episcopal Church was very involved in the Civil Rights movement in the 60s. We didn't all agree on what to do or how to do it, just as we didn't all agree about the abolition of slavery. Many of us had vested interests in maintaining the status quo. It is no different today.

I have a good life and I don't want to let go of any of my privileges and I have worked to reduce my disadvantages. I am sure that you have done the same.

But we serve Jesus Christ, who did not consider his equality with God, but chose to give up that privilege and to become human with all its limitations, discomfort, shame and eventually very painful death. We serve Jesus who said that the first must be last. We serve Jesus who went against all his cultural training and healed the daughter of a Gentile woman.

People of God, it is time that we stopped holding onto our privilege and rolled up our sleeves and did what we said we would do.

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

“I will with God's help”

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

“I will, with God's help.”

Let us pray:

All Compassionate God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in

us your servants the covenant you made with us at our Baptism. Send us forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*