

Sermon, Proper 15A

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https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp15_RCL.html

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 56:1,6-8

Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,

all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant--

these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;

**for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.**

Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Matthew 15: 21-28

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.

INTRO

Thus says the LORD: **... my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**

Today's 1st reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, casts a vision of radical inclusion in the household—and worship—of God.

Thus says the LORD: **... my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**

1. IMAGINING This vision of radical inclusion is incredibly **beautiful**
2. EMBODYING This vision of radical inclusion is incredibly **hard**
 - a. Last week several of us watched the Safe Church Model on Inclusion. (Common Sense?? Not for most of us.) *realized eschatology* (already/not yet)
3. The bottom line is that moving towards the vision of radical inclusion that we glimpse in Isaiah is a JOURNEY....it's our direction of intention, our direction of movement, our direction of growth...paso a paso, step by step, breath by breath.

4. This call to Radical Inclusion is God's DREAM and God's PROMISE. And it is our dream, and our promise too. As a Church Community, committed to following the Way of Jesus, formed and empowered by our Baptismal Covenant, we are bound together by our vows to God and to one another—we promise to keep working and praying and laughing and learning and repenting and forgiving and stumbling and trying again—we bravely promise to keep on “failing forward” (a phrase I learned from my colleague Sarah Bentley Allred). “Failing Forward in Faith.” Maybe that should be our new church motto. Last week Robin Connel walked into our Eldering Group wearing a T-shirt that read “Walking by Faith. Tripping Continually.” Exactly.

AS WE STRIVE TO LIVE INTO GOD'S PROMISE OF RADICAL INCLUSION WHERE CAN WE LOOK FOR GUIDANCE & ENCOURAGEMENT?

What tools help us as we strive to join God's mission of building & becoming “a house of prayer for all people”? Today I'd like to suggest 3 potential sources of wisdom and inspiration as we continue bravely daring to “fail forward with faith”; as we continue tenaciously striving to become God's “House of Prayer for All People”

1. Today's Gospel

a. Living into God's radically inclusive vision was a learning process, even for Jesus, himself (see today's Gospel)

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. [1]

IGNORES] *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.” [2] RESISTS,*

RATIONALIZES] *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.” [3] REJECTS, REFUSES]* *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.” [4) REPENTS. LISTENS. CHANGES HIS MIND. SOMEHOW, IN HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE WOMAN, SOMETHING SHIFTS AND JESUS’ HEART, JESUS’ PERSPECTIVE, JESUS’ UNDERSTANDING, JESUS’ MINISTRY EXPANDS AND MAKES ROOM FOR HER.] And her daughter was healed instantly. [5) HEALING HAPPENS]

Be humble. Be flexible. Be Willing to listen. Willing to learn. Willing to change our minds. Willing to allow the Holy Spirit to continually expand our hearts, our minds, our perspectives, our experiences, our Church to make room for something—for someone new. **Be humble. Be flexible. Healing happens when we make room for each other.**

2. Today’s Epistle

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Be secure. Relax. You Belong. It seems like the Jews in the Roman Church were worried that welcoming Gentiles into the church somehow imperiled their own identity and belovedness and belonging as God’s children. “But I thought WE were the Chosen Ones”, members of the Church complain, especially in seasons of stress and anxiety, in every time and place. And in every time and place, God assures us, “That’s right, you are the Chosen Ones. I choose you. AND I choose them, too. I’m GOD and I get to choose as many people as I want. And I choose ALL of you.” There is enough love. There is enough grace. There is enough room. There is enough work. There is enough room for EVERYONE. You are gifted. You are called. You are chosen. There will ALWAYS be a place here for you. **Be secure. Relax. You Belong.**

3. **Finally, 5 hallmarks** ([Roots & Wings Collaborative](#)) ...focus is on building capacity to make room for all *generations* in *worship*, but the same principles can help us grow towards greater inclusion of all kinds of diversity in all kinds of contexts. I am convinced that a commitment to practicing these 5 hallmarks are key to growing in our baptismal vow to “respect the dignity of every human person”---of varying ages (to be sure), AND ALSO of varying backgrounds, varying abilities and disabilities, varying levels of health and wellness (including mental, spiritual, and physical health), varying sexual orientations and family structures, varying political orientations, varying genders, varying cultures, varying financial resources, varying levels of education, varying learning styles, varying communication styles, varying preferences, and varying personalities--and all the other differences in a community that make living into God’s vision of radical inclusion so essential and so spectacularly challenging.

If you’re anything like me, (then depending on the context and depending on your mood) you probably find *some* forms of diversity and difference enriching and energizing. And you probably find *some* forms of diversity and difference challenging, scary, or just really irritating. Welcome to the club. Welcome to life in community. I invite you to **call to mind a particular individual or a group whose “difference” you find especially challenging**, and as I describe these 5 hallmarks, consider how each principle might apply in your relationship with that person or group.

1. **Intentionality:** Proactively orienting our spiritual and community life to value the gifts and needs of people who differ from us, rather than defaulting to segregation
2. **Relationality:** Fostering deep, meaningful interactions that go beyond polite, surface-level co-existence with people who differ from us
3. **Dignified Reciprocity:** Inviting and receiving contributions from people who differ from us in a way that respects each person's unique dignity and equal value.
4. **Flexibility:** Approaching life in community with a posture of grace and making comfortable space for our shared humanity and varied needs.
5. **Empowerment:** Unbinding and releasing the spiritual gifts of *every* member—to serve the entire community.

CONCLUSION

Embracing Diversity. Navigating Difference. Living in Community.
Being Church.

This is holy work. And this is hard work. Really, really, really hard work. And this ongoing work. We won't always get it right. We won't get it all at once. This is the work of a lifetime. This is the work of eternity. This work IS the Kingdom of God.

When the going gets tough and you're tempted to give up, remember: God's dream, God's call, and God's promise are trustworthy and enduring.

As Paul says in his letter to the Romans:
...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

As you persevere in this hard, holy week of being the Church, cling fierce hope and tenacity to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

**Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts,,,
... my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.
[.and] I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.**

Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Amen.