

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Newark, DE
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 20, 2017/Year A
Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God. AMEN

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“If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention.” These words are spoken by Susan Bro, the mother of Heather Heyer, the young woman killed in Charlottesville VA last Saturday. These words framed the prayer service on Wednesday at Bethel AME Church in Wilmington. These words frame the ongoing call to living into our faith as the ones who call Jesus as our Lord.

We continue to allow too much polarizing speech about **the others** of our country and our world to rule our minds and hearts. Media and political voices dominate the floods of words, words, words, while too many good Christian folk paddle right along these vile streams of thinking and acting. After our remembrance of the Transfiguration and the first atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6, who of good faith would agree with a Christian pastor's statement that God desires the “nuking of North Korea?” **Is this what the God we worship and the Jesus we follow looks like today?**

Brian McClaren is Christian pastor, writer, speaker, and advocating voice for the **emerging church** of open faith dialogue and living together. His book I am currently reading gives pretty clear hint to this faith stance. It is titled **Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?** I will give you a spoiler alert – it is NOT to separate themselves from **the others** but to gather in togetherness, one with another, and to move forward into our world.

For me, there are **no “the others”** when we live and act out of a mature faith. There are **no “the others”** in the Jesus Movement.

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The unfolding saga of the life of Jacob comes to its end with the story of Joseph in Egypt. We remember how Joseph got to Egypt by his brothers selling him into slavery, and then lying to patriarch Jacob about his untimely death to the wilderness beasts. Yet God's presence is very much upon and through Joseph in captivity. The “dreamer” provides insight to the Pharaoh of the coming years of plentiful harvest to be followed by an equally severe time of famine. He is promoted with authority in the Egyptian hierarchy, becoming one with them **until ...**

His brothers come to Egypt and Joseph looking for grain to feed the family and flocks of father Jacob plagued by the same drought. The story could have unfolded with Joseph returning in retribution upon his brothers for what they had done to him, **until ...**

His open mind and heart are kindled with familial affection to his brothers and father Jacob. I suspect they felt the weight of guilt wash over them, fully expecting the worst of treatment by Joseph, **until** Joseph says through his opened heart in truth and grace, “...*now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.*” He emphasizes three times that **God sent me** through their less-than-loving actions for their welfare and the world he served to “**the others**” of Egypt. By the work of God **in and through** human history then, Joseph redeemed and was reunited to his family of origin.

The encounter with the Canaanite woman is one of those stories we would rather take out of the lectionary cycle. We hope Jesus did not really **ignore, reject, and insult her**. I hear this story of Jesus learning what it means to be **one with an open heart and open mind to “the others.”** I hear this story of Jesus learning what it means to be **God’s presence in ALL the world.**

Matthew’s version seems to suggest Jesus was not embracing of all people as he responds, “*I was sent ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” The teachable moment comes not from Jesus but from the Canaanite woman. Her persistence and faith IN Jesus, seemingly even more than the very disciples, moves her forward in this encounter.

I receive this story out the place of **divine intimacy and mutuality of deepest relationship with “the others”** . In other words, **God’s looks and receives us exactly as we are, without judgment or distortion, subtraction or addition.** Being received **just as we are** is what transforms us into being the light bearers to our world. Light bearers who transform their world by **faith not fear.**

In order to be light bearers of Jesus in our day, for ourselves and to all “**the others**” of our world, we have to have **three spaces** opened within us at the same time – **our opinionated head, our closed heart, and our defensive and defended body.** You see, when Jesus says WE are the light of the world earlier in Matthew, then WE have the capacity to carry this same light of love and life to ALL. However, when we only “worship” Jesus, we rarely **imitate** his life and bear this light by faith. **In other words, there is NO MOVEMENT with Jesus.**

There is a saying that goes something like this – “**Courage is the ability to move forward when we are afraid ... Faith is the ability to move forward WITHOUT FEAR.**” Religion as “institution” can produce the very worst in us, while “movement” can produce the very best through us. Jesus says again and again that mere mental belief systems change nothing and more often are dividing and divisive. Faith calls into life ALL of us – mind, body, and heart – to bear this light of Jesus to our world ... to BE the Jesus Movement now.

This story invites us to encounter “**the others**” with new or renewed heart and eyes. To experience the gifts they may hold before us, the teachable moments we may need to experience. We are told the Canaanite woman had **great faith, NOT great courage.** She stands firm against the rebuke and rejection of the disciples, even the silence of a reluctant Jesus. Yet from the very start, she never stops calling Jesus **Lord** until the spark of the Divine is kindled in his heart.

We are called to **pay attention** to those people and events that **disrupt and discomfort** our “normal” days, these intrusions into our well-ordered, well-controlled worlds. There are **no “the others”** when we live and act out of a mature faith. There are **no “the others”** in the Jesus Movement.

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Renown Hebrew scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, **“The great crisis among us is the crisis of “the common good,” the sense of community solidarity that binds all in a common destiny—haves and have nots, the rich and the poor. We face a crisis about the common good because there are powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny. Mature people [with mature faith], at their best, are people who are committed to the common good that reaches beyond private interest, transcends sectarian commitments, and offers human solidarity.”**

To be blessed into sharing life with our true and living God of ALL creation and created is not an **either/or thing ... it is ONLY a both/and thing.** It is bearing this light of Jesus AS our identity to **mission and reconciliation** that we will be **blessed to be a blessing ... to be “the others” for the sake of the others ... to receive and give blessings with ALL other blessed people.** This is how we join God into healing a world torn by our human hostility.

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