

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah reminds us all today in our first lesson;
(that the Lord's) house shall be called a house of prayer *for all peoples*.⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. (Isaiah 56:7b-8)

Such is the gathering today as we have gathered here right now with many different people with many different life experiences, stories, backgrounds, and upbringings. It is as Detrick Bonhoeffer said; by the grace of God that a gathering such as we have here right now assembled to worship.

In this worship, we hear about...and have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who frees us all from the bondage of sin and death. We learn then in this gathering that it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, makes us holy, or makes us worthy as Christ to stand before God. It is in this gathering that our faith is fed and nurtured in this Holy Word and in this Holy Meal. In this gathering we have heard these words of encouragement from Jesus:

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

We have also heard Jesus say to the disciples and to us:

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

Through our faith we know and we believe that Jesus gives grace, mercy, and life to us, not as the world gives to us, but God through Jesus Christ gives in ways we cannot fully understand even to giving his very life...for us. And even in the face of his own death we hear Jesus say what I think are some of the most comforting words in the entire Bible:

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing...(Luke 23:34)

Forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing...nonetheless, we know enough to come to worship to be reassured of this forgiveness that Jesus seeks for us from the Father. And so we gather in the presence of this comfort, this promise of salvation and life that is the Good News of Jesus Christ. But seated within the lessons that seem to place the focus very easily on this gathering, there is a shift in focus from in here to out there. This morning after listening to the words of the prophet Isaiah, we prayed for God to continue blessing the inhabitants of the whole earth with this petition of the Psalm:

² Let your ways be known upon earth,
your saving health among all nations. (Psalm 67:2)

So we pray that the Good News of the Lord's ways, His grace and forgiveness, His mercy, and His promise of new life be known upon the earth...and his saving health among all nations. My question then for us this morning is, how do you suppose the Lord's ways that we all claim to have faith in, how do you suppose these ways are to be made known upon the earth and among

all nations? How are “they” to know about these ways of God? Or as St. Paul asks the church in Rome:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?
And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?
(Romans 10:14)

I think its safe to say that we who have gathered here today believe in the Lord’s grace, forgiveness, and life given to us through Jesus Christ with all our hearts and our souls...but now what? You’re good to go...I’m good to go...is this then all the farther this Good News is supposed to go? What about those who have not heard? How is it that *we* have come to believe in this Good News...to believe the Lord’s ways of grace, mercy, and life? Have we done something special to receive this faith and this understanding of the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Yes...without a doubt...we have come to know of the blessing and sanctification through faith...a faith given to us through the Holy Spirit but someone has proclaimed this message to us somewhere along the lined...so do we now keep it to ourselves? And when and if we share this Good News of Jesus Christ with others, do we make this sanctification a burden for others instead of grace? Does the grace and forgiveness found in the Good News of Jesus Christ only apply to those whom I choose and does it only work according to my understanding? Does the Good News only apply to those who live according to *MY* standards? If I don’t believe in grace and mercy for others who are not like me or those whom I don’t see eye to eye with, then I believe that we truly don’t believe it at all...we are just blind then to the fullness of the grace given to all. We become blinded with our judgments and assumptions about faith in others and we become like the Pharisees in our Gospel lessons...we are then the blind leading the blind.

Nonetheless, within our divisive and conflicted culture today we parse Jesus out according to our political and social likes and dislikes. The heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ is destroyed through the media of public opinion and the truth of the Good News has no bearing on it all because it has to do with my likes and dislikes. Meanwhile, as we turn our blindness to what goes on, as it occurs around us today, we can sit safely in our congregations and profess our love of God, our love of Jesus Christ and claim with the utmost reassurance that our souls are good to go because we have faith. And in this...we say to ourselves and like-minded folks, the world just doesn’t get it...and we are safe in here while those out there are the ones who are cast out to the depths of hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the reality of the Good News that has been placed into our hearts, like it or not, all this cultural stuff plays into the Good News of Jesus Christ...the cultural stuff plays into our faith and how that faith plays out in our everyday lives. And this is what we see play out in our Gospel lesson with Jesus and the Pharisees and with the exchange between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. We see in these characters our culture and our understanding of faith and how it plays out according to our sensitivities and our understandings but Jesus shows us that true faith in him goes against all of it.

Mother Teresa, the "Saint of the Gutters," when receiving that ultimate worldly accolade, the Nobel Peace Prize said in her acceptance lecture:

"It is not enough for us to say, 'I love God, but I do not love my neighbor,'" she said, since in dying on the Cross, God had "[made] himself the hungry one--the naked one--the homeless one." Jesus' hunger, she said, is what "you and I must find" and alleviate.¹

Faith moves us, compels us to act, it instills that hunger of Jesus that burns within us...that causes us to act...graciously and mercifully. Luther defines faith this way:

Faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.²

Today in our Gospel we see faith, NOT in the disciples, NOT in the insiders, but we see faith in the outcast, the Gentile woman. Her's is a faith that is so strong even Jesus is heard saying, "Woman, great is your faith!" Interestingly as the woman appears in this lesson, the faith of the disciples is depicted this way when they approach Jesus:

"Send her (*that Canaanite, that Gentile woman*) away, for she keeps shouting after us."

Here is faith in action by the disciples who we assume are models of faith, and why not, they are with Jesus Christ himself...contrast that with this woman...this Canaanite, this Gentile, this outsider...she has more than likely only HEARD about Jesus but she shows us what faith really is. The very disciples of Jesus, these so-called "insiders" seem slow to understand, they are depicted as having only "little faith." But this *woman*, this foreigner, this Canaanite, this Gentile, this outsider absorbs the slap of the racial slur and responds NOT with hostility but with a steadfast and determined faith.³ This is the same faith that has been poured into each of us who have gathered and joined in worship today.

We are the ones who are driven by faith who have gathered with others who have already gathered and approached Jesus in this worship. This is a faith that we are freely given NOT because of what we imagine faith to be, not because of what we understand faith to be and certainly not because of who we are. This faith is given to us because of who God is! And it is a faith that ought to be shared and recognized by our actions through the very grace that has been given and proclaimed to each of us. This faith given to us is God's love given to us all...this faith is God's forgiveness given to us...this faith is God's kingdom that gathers us all in His eternal presence. This faith ought to compel each of us to be as forgiving and gracious as God is to each of us through Jesus Christ. This is how we are to proclaim the Good News among the nations and others.

¹ This quote is an excerpt from an article on line entitled, "Mother Teresa's Crisis of Faith" by David Van Biema, Aug 23, 2007.

Site this: <https://time.com/4126238/mother-teresas-crisis-of-faith/>

² "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther's German Bible of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546 Translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith from DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S VERMISCHTE DEUTSCHE SCHRIFTEN. Johann K. Irmischer, ed. Vol. 63 (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1854), pp.124-125. [EA 63:124-125] August 1994

³ Van Harn, Roger E.. The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Third Readings: Gospels. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. These two lines are from the commentary on the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, Gospel lesson: Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28, page 93.

May our faith teach us to recognize what we do not see so that we may not do the ill or hurt that we do rather may we be lead and guided to do...and to be...God's will.⁴ May our faith allow us to declare to others...in truth and in action the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁴ Job 34:32-33b