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Gospel lesson

In last week's lectionary reading, Jesus walked on water to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Upon landing, Jesus continued healing the sick. As word spread, pharisees and scribes came to check out Jesus, and started nitpicking at his disciples' behavior (eating without washing first).

Jesus confronted their hypocrisy by quoting Isaiah 29:13, "these people ... honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote."

That brings us to:



scrawled picture by Melanie Simmons

Matthew 15:10-28

NRSV

¹⁰ Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand:

¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

¹² Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?"

¹³ He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father

has not planted will be uprooted.

¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit."

¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us."

¹⁶ Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding?

¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?

¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

²² 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."

²³ 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."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

²⁶ He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

Have you ever intentionally hurt someone? How did/would that make you feel? <Let them respond>

When you feel guilty about hurting someone, how do you feel about approaching them? Do you like going up to them? <Let them respond>

What makes it good to go up to them again, to do things with them? <Let them respond>

Is it only you that has to act? <Let them respond>

Is it only them that has to act? <Let them respond>

So if one person treats another badly, to restore

their relationship, both sides have to be willing to put love into it. Do you remember what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments?

<Let them respond>

Why do you think those are most important?

<Let them respond>

Do you always treat God and God's children well?

<Let them respond>

Do you know how God feels about you?

<Let them respond>

The Good News Jesus brought to us is that no matter what we have done, God is always willing to reconcile with us if we are truly repentant of our sin. By sharing God's love, we can help restore relationships broken by sin in this world.

What happens if we focus on a person as our hero instead of on God? <Let them respond>

People are not perfect, but God is – and only God has the knowledge of what is truly good for all in a given situation, to give us the best path forward.

May we always strive to let the fruit of God's love flow out of our mouths rather than the things of evil intentions that Jesus described as defiling a person.

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<Hymn "Help Us Accept Each Other">

UMH #560>

Message: Unity of Praise



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/praise-break/week-3-twelfth-sunday-after-pentecost/week-3-twelfth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-praise-break-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Uniting God who blesses us in community,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may join in praise of you and share Your love
throughout our world, as all are Your people. Amen.

We conclude our "Praise Break" series today in "Unity
of Praise."

"This final week highlights belonging as the heart
of praise, drawing on the unity described in the
psalms. ~~It invites congregations~~ [We are invited]
to embrace practices like singing and prayer that
foster connection, reminding us that as we worship
together, we grow in belonging-to God and to one
another-and offer praise as a shared, communal
experience."

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I saw a really cool video on YouTube recently about
how ancient humans kept kids alive.¹ When you think
about how most mammals are able to move about for

themselves within hours of birth but human babies are completely helpless for months, the logistics of care become something requiring far more than just one parent or even a couple can provide by themselves.

Basically, in order to allow for post-natal development of our large brains, our species requires social support for raising newborns. You may have heard the phrase, “It takes a village.”

The video I watched talked about the roles of both men and women in tending all the children of a village, which strengthened social bonds between families and enabled everyone to survive better against mutual threats. It concluded that children everywhere survived when they were “embedded in social connection and struggled when they were isolated,” which is still true today.¹

I believe that is because God created us to live in love, and we can only do that when we share love with others. Love of ourselves to the exclusion of others causes all of those things Jesus describes as defiling a person. Certainly Joseph’s brothers, in loving themselves to the exclusion of Joseph, were guilty of sin that defiled their hearts.

Yet Joseph held onto God, through slavery, through prison, through service to Pharaoh. Joseph’s love of the one true God and memory of the love of his childhood family enabled his forgiveness of his brothers. He wanted to restore their relationships.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnjolbkfJwo>

His brothers, on the other hand, were afraid. Their hearts had been defiled by their sin, so they could not accept what he was telling them – until he embraced the one innocent one, his full brother Benjamin, and then all his other brothers could talk with him.

Do you see the parallels with our Savior? God is calling to us, telling us that life on this earth is hard but God will provide for us if we abide with God – yet until God embraced the one innocent one, Jesus (through resurrection from death), we could not truly comprehend that God actually loves us.

God loves all of us. As Paul put it, “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” For the Creator of all, this includes both the descendants of Abraham and all other peoples on earth.

In the Gospel today, we heard about a Canaanite woman approaching Jesus. Talk about an outsider! Nearly every barrier and prejudice that existed in that day against helping her was present: cultural, ethnic, political, economic, and religious. When she challenged the covenant privilege of the Israelites, Jesus let the disciples express themselves first, that the true nature of their relationship be known: the Israelites viewed her as an outsider, as a dog.

And God used her faith to heal that relationship, to bring acceptance and inclusion through the healing of her daughter. God’s love breaks the cycle of sin and isolation, and brings us back to harmonious unity in life. We need to share God’s love to break the cycle

of sin in our lives still today.

✝ Look for where you feel hurt/isolated.

Ask: Why? What makes you feel that way?

✝ Consider: How can you show love to counter that?

Joseph's brothers rejected Joseph after a bad report to their father, which broke their family relationships. Years later, Joseph forgave and supported his brothers during their time of need, which healed their family relationships. What can you do to heal your family relationships?

The Pharisees and scribes focused on behaviors affecting the self, using such to justify rejection and exclusion; Jesus focused on behaviors affecting others, using such to justify acceptance and inclusion. What behaviors do you focus on? What are you working on for self-improvement?

Note also that society (like the disciples) tends toward an inward group focus; Jesus expands focus toward outsiders. We are meant to live in harmony with everyone, not just those with whom we are already comfortable – and the only way we can do that is to put God first in our lives, because anything else falls short and excludes something or someone that God would include.