



“Not in My Backyard, My City, My Country, My World”

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Scripture (CEB):

Matthew 15:10-28

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd near and said to them, “Listen and understand.¹¹ It’s not what goes **into** the mouth that contaminates a person in God’s sight. It’s what comes **out** of the mouth that contaminates the person.”

¹² Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you just said?”

¹³ Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be pulled up. ¹⁴ Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. But if a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch.”

¹⁵ Then Peter spoke up, “Explain this riddle to us.”

¹⁶ Jesus said, “Don’t you understand yet? ¹⁷ Don’t you know that everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸ But what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight. ¹⁹ Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults. ²⁰ These contaminate a person in God’s sight. But eating without washing hands doesn’t contaminate in God’s sight.”

²¹ From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from those territories came out and shouted, “Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.” ²³ But he didn’t respond to her at all.

His disciples came and urged him, “Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us.”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.”

²⁵ But she knelt before him and said, “Lord, help me.”

²⁶ He replied, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and toss it to dogs.”

²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish.” And right then her daughter was healed.

Sermon:

Americans, or at least this American, are caught up in a maelstrom of emotions. This week has been rough, last weekend was a nightmare, and for someone like me, coming off of vacation, I feel that I got dropped into an alternate universe.

There is hatred, vile, spitting, violent, cruel hatred. In tiki torches and khaki, with swastikas and swagger, and with astonishing inhuman language that falls like poison on our ears. We hide the children away from their words on tv, radio, social media, the papers.

And there is fear; knee knocking, door locking fear. Fear that keeps you from letting the kids ride their bikes to the convenience store, fear that keeps you from the park, the church, the movie theatre. Fear has put my pepper spray in the outside pocket of my purse. Fear has kept my transgender, Muslim, gay and lesbian friends, my neighbors and friends of color...in a state of constant anxiety.

And there is courage. Interfaith Clergy standing arm in arm facing people who spit at, hit, pushed and pepper sprayed them. There is the courage of marchers in Boston who came out in their thousands to shout down the voices of hate. The courage of a mother whose daughter was just murdered under the wheels of a car, but she stood up and told us all that her daughter will not be forgotten as long as we use our power to push back against the darkness that killed her.

Of course, there is anger, and outrage, confusion and cynicism, despair even. There is the sharp wittiness of the comedians, the elegant prose of the educated, the harsh name-calling and the paranoid victimizations. And a dozen different ways to hear about it endlessly...

Standing here with you this morning, I wonder; what shall we do?

When Spokane has to rise up against the haters, I believe the people of Westminster will be there. We know the history of our region, and Hayden Lake is more than a name...it stirs dark memories in us.

We confess our sin of racism. We work to repent of it.

We acknowledge our white privilege. We fight for the human rights of all people.

We know that we must sit in silence and listen to the voices of the marginalized. We respond humbly, we stand in solidarity.

And there is one thing more: we create a safe space here.

Over the years, I have sometimes bemoaned this great big stone space; so much to keep up with!

Right now, it feels like a bastion. A place where harm shall not come. A place to stop evil at the door and say, “you shall not enter here.”

I invite you to join me in reaffirming that our sanctuary is indeed a “sanctuary”. A safe place where the love of God shines like the sun. A place where every child, every elder, every person is held in respect, in love. That in this place every person is beloved and cherished. And we see every person here with the eyes of God; eyes of love.

Jesus himself was clearly just learning how to see with the eyes of God in this gospel message today. It should give you and I a little encouragement: Jesus was sounding pretty snarky, pretty ethnocentric, pretty racist when he says, I come for my own. Not someone like you, you Canaanite outsider; you and your sick kid are not my concern.

Ouch!

That’s mean. It sounds terrible. He calls her a dog!

And that woman, that outsider does what has to be done: she makes her voice heard. In the face of their religious exclusivism, in the face of their ethnocentrism, their racism, their sexism...she shouts and shouts and shouts. The disciples tell Jesus to send her away, she is so obnoxious. He talks down to her, but she won’t stop for his superior attitude, she won’t be cowed by his insults.

And Jesus learns. He learns a big lesson, a hard lesson. I wonder if he flushed with embarrassment? Or face palmed himself at his own stupidity? He finally sees that woman as God sees her, with the eyes of love, respect and dignity.

He is changed.

And the design of God; for the healing and restoration of all creation, not just one little corner of it, but ALL of it, encompasses that foreign woman and her sick child.

You know, as we gather here today we are confronted with a nation, our nation, in the midst of torturously difficult conversations. But they have to be spoken. Racism is real. White privilege is real. Systemic racism and cultural bias are all around us, from our “founding fathers” to us, this very day.

We have learned much from our gay and lesbian and trans and gender nonconforming friends and members. All the fears, the hopes, the struggles that we have shared...we have to listen and share even more.

We have to continue to broaden the knowledge of our minds, the bitter truths that people of color and sexual, religious and social minorities struggle under...and how we choose to be blind to their struggle and suffering, the injustice they labor under, the fear that haunts their days and nights.

We have to open the doors of our hearts...open them wide to compassion, friendship, support and sanctuary. Be safe, be loving, be open and warm.

We have to speak up, speak out, stand up and be brave. In the grocery store, in the schools, in city hall, in the streets. We are white people of power and we must use it for others.

Many of you know our home and have been there, and have seen how we often sport yard signs in our front yard.

Our newest sign reads: ***“In this house, we believe: black lives matter; women’s rights are human rights; no human is illegal; science is real; water is life; in religious freedom; love is love; kindness is everything.”***

And we have another starker sign too: “Black Lives Matter.”

I have an idea that these signs might provoke conversation. We shall see. So far, I have one neighbor who wants such a sign in her yard too. I’d like to see them pop up all over our neighborhoods.

Because we need to be strong enough, brave enough and clear enough to say: Hate has no place in my backyard (or front yard!) my city, my nation, my world.

Haters have to know that they have no place to turn with their hate. And that I will not submit to their agenda of division, fear, and violence.

I will love and cherish others who are not like me. My door will try to stay open. My heart will try to stay open.

This church, and my heart, will be a sanctuary for all to feel the love of God. And we know that the love of God is vast and sweeping and powerful and free, joyful and rich, healing and life giving. This love, we will share it.

Can I get an Amen?

BENEDICTION:

“A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what kind of gospel is that?” Bishop Oscar Romero