

King of Glory Lutheran Church – August 19-20, 2017
Matthew 15:10-28 Time to Shout
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Living in God's love for all people, we are called to speak and act with justice for those who experience injustice. It's not enough to be silent, for that silence is complicit in systemic injustice. As a confessing church, we are called to confess that which we believe.

We begin tonight (this morning) with the words of the Psalm that is appointed for today: Psalm 67:1-3. *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.*

The Gospel for today presents a picture of Jesus that makes us uncomfortable. There she is; a woman with a request of healing for her daughter. And it's not a polite, quiet request. It's the middle of a crowded ER, shout of pain and urgency. "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is sick. I need your help right now!" Jesus answers with only silence at first. This is not the Jesus we know. Then perhaps following their Rabbi's lead, the disciples turn on her as well. "Send her away. She keeps shouting at us."

What follows is increasingly painful. Jesus answers by stating that He was only sent to a certain group of people, and *that* woman is on the margin of where His grace goes. "I was sent only to the people of Israel. Not to the people of Canaan.

So she changes her tone of voice. She changes her posture. Kneeling in front of the One she believes to be a Savior, she makes her request again. "Help me." Thinking of her own blood and kin, the daughter that lays at home, her persistence comes from that maternal 'mama bear', 'fight for my own' instinct. "I've got to advocate for her. I won't stop, until Jesus says, 'yes'" she thinks.

It only gets worse. Jesus calls her a 'dog.' It is an insult which could have added injury, but thinking quickly, the woman uses it to turn once again back on Jesus. "Yes, but even the dogs get to eat crumbs."

Let's think categorically for a moment about the two people in this interaction. Jesus is a Jew. Jesus is a teacher, a Rabbi. He is the Son of God. The woman is, well, a woman! Women did not have status. She is from a pagan area Canaan, thus is an outsider. As such, she is considered 'unclean.' No one knew what she had touched or ate, so from a Jewish perspective, this woman had multiple strikes against her.

Yet, she persists. She could've gone away dejected after Jesus' silence at the very first, but she doesn't. This woman persists. She speaks up on behalf of herself and the dire situation with her daughter. She addresses Jesus as "Lord, Son of David" which is a confession of sorts – a confession of who she realizes Jesus is and His power to heal. In short, she doesn't stay quiet.

Two people. Meeting in the street. Both digging in their heels for what they believe. There weren't any clubs, any flags, any cars, or knives; but a meeting of two people face to face and their words.

This text falls in the middle of Matthew's Gospel. A Gospel which begins listing a solid Jewish lineage for the baby Jesus ends with His words to 'go and make disciples of all nations.' Could it just be, could it be, that a persistent, outspoken woman turns the trajectory of Jesus' ministry towards people unlike Himself? Could it possibly be that God used her to teach Jesus a lesson?

I love that we ELCA Lutherans utilize the lectionary, a prescribed set of scriptures for each weekend of the year. It keeps us actually hearing and reading Bible passages and on weekends like this, it can be timely in an uncanny way.

Look back, if you would at the reading from Isaiah. 'Maintain justice, do what is right.' The Hebrew for the word 'maintain' means 'keep, guard, preserve, protect, or defend'. (Shamar) (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/8104.htm>) Keep justice, preserve justice, and protect justice. And in preserving justice, that includes naming injustice. That takes maintenance. It takes effort.

Then in verse six: 'all the foreigners who love the Lord, all the foreigners, those who serve and worship me, well they will be welcome in my house of prayer. Their sacrifices will be honored too,' says the Lord. Not just Israel, but all the foreigners. Remember, that here in this context, there was ethnic and racial strife among the peoples. 'Israel' is not what we know it as a nation state, but rather the Lord is speaking about God's chosen people, the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. And the Lord says through the prophet Isaiah, 'all the foreigners are welcome.'

You and me are foreigners as Christians. We were the Gentiles. Look around. We don't have many families named Goldberg or Kagan or Finkelstein around here do we? And Jesus? Well a dominant culture crucified Jesus, a member of the oppressed culture, while they were living under occupation. That's Jesus story. Yet through Jesus' death, we as Gentiles were grafted into the Tree of Life. We are the outsiders. We are the woman shouting at Jesus.

Church, it's time to shout. Not at Jesus, but because of Jesus. Too often the Church has been silent at moments like this. What we saw last weekend at Charlottesville was not right. White supremacy is a sin. It violates what we find in scripture – the lessons we read today do not support white supremacy. And it's time to name it.

Martin Luther in his Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, defended a theses which stated A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. (<http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>) So let's call white supremacy what it is. Sin.

We as the ELCA are a confessing church. We confess what we believe and as such we are also a public church. The ELCA's social statement "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture" adopted in 1993 states: "Racism—a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice—is sin, a violation of God's intention for humanity. The resulting racial, ethnic, or cultural barriers deny the truth that

all people are God's creatures and, therefore, persons of dignity. Racism fractures and fragments both church and society."

The social statement, calls on the church to make confession for complicity, name the spiritual crisis at the roots, commit to change and make pledges to public witness, advocacy and action to confront racism.

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton said this week, "We recognize that the kind of violence we witnessed in Charlottesville last weekend is very real and affects all of us. We need to stand up firmly against racism and anti-Semitism, show up for and advocate with others. Jesus, who makes visible those who are invisible, is already there. We need to show up, and we need to listen in each of our communities." (<http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7896>)

Jesus made visible the noisy shouting invisible outsider who persisted for her rights as a human being. And as such he validated her role and rights as a woman, a mother, a Gentile. God's saving action was meant for people like her and for any person like her.

I know and am constantly thankful that here at KOG we have decided that we are going to maintain a welcoming stance to all peoples. Our overwhelming decision to become a Reconciled in Christ congregation exemplifies that commitment. But it's not enough. It's not enough to have a lovely framed RIC statement hanging in our concourse. It's not enough to print the mission statement on the front of the bulletin that says, 'We welcome all people to grow in faith.'

The days of just hoping that someone notices our church, or might guess that we are Christian are over. We have to speak. If we are quiet, we have not maintained justice and will become complicit to racism, anti-Semitism, and all injustice by our silence.

What I've been praying about this week, is what can I do? What can we do as the people of God in Loveland, Colorado to respond? Going back to replay the videos or the interviews only perpetuates the violence and allows evil to gain a firmer footing in our minds and spirits. We cannot go back. We must come forward. The woman who confronted Jesus came forward out of nowhere and basically said, "See me!"

Remember the Cosentyx commercials for plaque psoriasis which implore people to see past the scales and dry patches of their skin. God implores us to fight for those who long to be seen. To help the helpless be seen as people not as 'homeless' or 'Jew' or 'immigrant' or "enemy", but as child of God.

This week, in the middle of all the news about Charlottesville, there was a PBS story about a 93 year old WWII veteran who travelled from his home in Montana back to Japan for an emotional reunion. During the war, US Marine Marvin Strombo was an elite sniper scout with the 2nd Marine Division. He came across a body of a dead Japanese officer. There was a flag with the body from his home village with 180 signatures on it. It was a flag for good luck and support. As Marvin took the flag, he promised the man he would try to return it.

That emotional return happened for the remaining sisters and brother of the dead Japanese officer as they received the flag earlier this month. Once enemies, they are now friends because of an

act of compassion and a promise fulfilled. (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/73-years-later-wwii-veteran-returns-fallen-soldiers-family-keepsake/>)

It's time to speak. It's time to act. Where do we begin?

Here are a few thoughts about advocating for justice.

*Have a face to face conversation with someone who has a different view point than yours. Listen. Try to understand. Have compassion for one another.

*If a child or adult is being bullied, intervene. A bully gets to bully because many people are on the sidelines allowing it. Speak and make it stop.

*Read a book about compassion to first learn how our own tendencies to hang on to anger and egotism restrict us from having compassion for others. I would highly recommend, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, by Karen Armstrong.

*Write a letter to a person you need to forgive.

*Volunteer at a shelter for abused women. They are often the invisible victims of regular and systematic abuse. See them and honor them as God's beloved.

*Write a letter to a local Jewish synagogue, giving them support in light of anti-Semitic events last week. Our Jewish neighbors are in Ft Collins, Greeley, and Windsor – all around here.

*Sign the Charter for Compassion a portion of which reads: “*The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.*”

(<https://charterforcompassion.org/charter/charter-overview>)

Take a moment – and if you are willing – write down one thing you want to do this week to speak up and shout out. The woman was persistent. May we be as well. Amen