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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Sunday closest to August 17 |
| Proper 15 Year A RCL |

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| ***Track 1*** |  |  | | |
| Genesis 45:1-15 Psalm 133 Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 Matthew 15: 10-28 | | |  |  |

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Almighty God, give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of your redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of Christ’s most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

Many of you know that I was away on vacation for two weeks, to include three Sundays. I was oddly blessed in that time to travel to a monastery in Big Sur. You may or may not be aware that portions of the Pacific Coast Highway have been closed due to mudslides from heavy Spring rains, so traveling to the monastery involved crossing a high pass with 1000 foot drop offs. There was no internet and no cell phone coverage at the monastery. After this, I went to the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone national parks. Again, there was internet only if you paid exceptionally high rates for it. There was extremely patchy cell phone coverage, typically only text and not voice. I was effectively isolated from communication for about 10 days. It was blissful. I highly recommend it. If you don’t know about what is going on in the world, you can’t respond to it. Now given what all is going on in this country currently, that may not be a good thing, but at the time, it sure seemed desirable. There is something to not being tempted to respond to heart impulses, regardless of whether they are good or bad. I did not need to worry about whether the words coming out my mouth were poluting the world, there were no words and even if there were, no one could hear them anyway…

Oddly, my remote time makes me think of what it may have been like for Joseph. I mean we all have our family issues, that is for certain, but none is quite like this was. The back story, if you remember, is Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery because he was their father’s favorite. Over the years, Joseph had some quiet time. He didn’t have to deal with his brothers. I imagine at one point, his brothers would have been who he least wanted to see in all the world. He suffered, he moved on, and he moved past their pettiness. And then, through God working in him, he was able to forgive them, to help them, to point out that the good that had come through God by way of the initial ill will of his brothers. This is God’s will and God’s healing in the midst of a nearly fatal family riff. There is redemption and there is healing.

And this is God’s way. God’s way is towards wholeness and healing. I have a hard time writing this in the wake of the events in Charlottesville last weekend, even for me, your priest. I was there just over a year ago. The church that held the vigil the night before, which was surrounded by fascist neo-Nazis— that was my church. My FB feed is understandably filled with responses from people in Charlottesville. I do my best not to be political in sermons, but the events of Charlottesvile are not concerned with which candidate I voted for, or economic prosperity, or whether America is great now or was great ever, or ever will be again. Neonazis, KKK and other hate groups committing acts of terrorism are evil incarnate, plain and simple. To ignore that is to ignore the Gospel values enshrined in our baptismal covenant — to seek to serve Christ in all people. … [and] to love our neighbors – black, white, brown, Muslim, Jewish – ALL our neighbors.

And yet, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, possibly using words of Theodore Parker, a 19th century Unitarian minister, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” This bending towards justice, this making things right, this, and no other, is God’s way. Paul is clear in Romans that any action of people which rejects God does not lead to God’s rejection of those same people, whether they were the gentiles who rejected God in Israel, or the Jews that Paul sees as rejecting God’s son Jesus. God is constantly calling God’s people into the fulfillment of the kingdom, into the arc bending towards justice— despite, or maybe perhaps because of, the hate that is lodged in their hearts—- and I believe that is true even for white supremacists, nationalists, bigots, racists, and alt-right protestors, whatever stripe of hateful actor one can think of, whether they know it yet or not.

With all of the above stated, you are well within your boundaries to ask, well what about Jesus? This Gospel passage today is perhaps one of the most confusing passages in Scripture. It looks as if Jesus doesn’t respond to the Canaanitie woman’s pleas and when he does, he does not sound kind. What about Jesus?

Jesus seems so out of character in this Gospel passage and so a number of explanations have been offered by Christian interpreters.

Many have read this passage through the understanding that Jesus was fully divine and fully human. If Jesus is fully human, then he must also learn— the same learning as he does in the Gospel of Luke as he matures after his twelve year old trip to the temple in Jerusalem. He has to learn his mission and his call. That is one way of making sense of this passage.

Another way: Within the passage, it seems largely out of character that Jesus would refer to a Canaanite woman as a little dog. When one calls a woman a dog then, it means the same as when one calls a woman a dog now. Yet, the Greek word is not actually just “dog.” It is “a little dog” or perhaps a “puppy.” So it could be that there was a touch of irony in the passage. Maybe there was irony, a nod and a wink. Maybe this was his ironic way to communicate to the woman that, in fact, she too was accepted. Irony does not occur in the Gospels really, or if it does we don’t catch it because we’re not there to see the nod and the wink, but that explanation is somewhat compelling given that this passage follows on the heals of Jesus’ admonition that what pollutes is what comes out of the mouth.

One could also think that Jesus understood he was on the earth to do great things, but not all the good things. It is not as if this is the only Gentile person that Jesus talks to or heals. The Gentiles are the exceptions. If he had done ALL the great and good things, perhaps his time of ministry would have been cut even shorter, say a week instead of three years— as he would have offended EVERYONE even faster. But perhaps Jesus set the pattern, and left space for US to carry on the work of welcoming and including, making space for his disciples to do the work he had called them to do.

I find the last explanation the least clear, the hardest, but perhaps the most accurate—-you can’t always figure out what God in Jesus is up to. In a recent discussion with a friend’s nephew, he asked at one point: “why won’t God just make things clear?” God makes many things clear, for us to go into the world building the kingdom; but God does not make all things or even most things clear. I do not then think that “all things happen for a purpose.” I do not think that 6 million Jews were killed in World War II for a reason. I do not think that anyone is raped for a reason. I do not think that the horrors of any war, to include the war in Vietnam happen for a reason. I do believe that we cannot know God’s ways. As in the second song of Isaiah, as if God were speaking, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways.” Maybe the difficulty of understanding this passage – of understanding Jesus’ response – serves a purpose: it confronts us with the fact that the ways of God are often not what we expect, and the work of faith is to follow, patiently, knowing that God is working out the world’s redemption, even when we do not understand.

Still the woman’s daughter was healed. There is healing— God does not turn away from us when we turn away from God; God is always drawing us to God, along that long arc bending towards justice. Joseph could not have known his family would be healed. The woman recognized Jesus as a healer, but how this came about surprises us. There is much we cannot understand and yet the kingdom comes… each of us living the Gospel as best we can, knowing that healing is God’s way and it comes to all of us. And perhaps that is the most important message of comfort for us in these turbulent, disquieting times.