

all, now, and forever. If we do not have love in our hearts, our words of love will have little meaning. If we do not truly enjoy our faith, nobody is going to catch the fire of enjoyment from us. If our lives are not totally centred on Christ, we will not be Christ-bearers for others, no matter how pious our words.

The rock that is higher: story as truth / Madeleine L'Engle. 1993

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Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? How can you, how dare you, defraud the Lord, by applying it to any other purpose?

John Wesley, 1703–1791

Related topics

For further study:

Faith; ecumenism; mystery of the church; prayer; conversion; evangelization; discipleship; justice; social sin; unity

Closing Prayer

God of the nations,
to your table all are invited
and in your family no one is a stranger.

Satisfy the hunger
of those gathered in this house of prayer,
and mercifully extend to all the peoples on earth
the joy of salvation and faith.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 20, Year A²

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 15.odt • 2020-06-28

² *Opening prayers: scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999.*

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Proper 15

(Sunday between 14 and 20 August inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 56.1,6-8	God's promises to foreigners
Psalms 67	Thanksgiving for God's blessing
Romans 11.1-2a, 29-32	The remnant of Israel; the mercy of God
Matthew 15.[10-20] 21-28	[on clean and unclean]; healing of a Canaanite girl

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

On what is clean and what is unclean

[¹⁰Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand: "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."'¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?'¹³He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. '¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.' '¹⁵But Peter said to him, 'Explain this parable to us.' '¹⁶Then he said, 'Are you also still without understanding?'¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?'¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. '¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. '²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.]

The healing of a Canaanite girl

²¹Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A 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.' ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps

shouting after us.’²⁴He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’²⁶He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’²⁷She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’²⁸Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15.[10-20], 21-28 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Jesus had spoken before about cleanliness and purity. In the Sermon on the Mount he had spoken about ‘righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees’ (5.20). To the scribes and Pharisees Jesus was regarded as far too lax, irresponsible and irreligious. At the beginning of chapter 15 he engages in a discussion with the scribes and Pharisees (15.1-9). Then he turns to the crowd (15.10-11), and then to his disciples (15.12-20). True purity, he says, is not about input (like correct diet) but about output (speech and action). Then Jesus identifies true purity in intentions – the motivations of the heart. These are invisible, and can be hard to fathom, whereas the food we eat is easy to judge. Jesus includes a list of bad actions that come out of evil intentions (15.19), including several from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). He says all this to explain why his disciples do not ritually wash their hands, replying to the original criticism of the scribes and Pharisees (15.2).

In the story that follows, Jesus goes into the region of Tyre and Sidon, on the coast, in the north-west, Syro-Phoenicia, a predominantly non-Jewish area. Matthew calls the woman who approaches Jesus a Canaanite, the ancient designation of the inhabitants of the area, whereas Mark (7.24) calls her Syro-Phoenician. The woman pleads with Jesus for healing, not for herself but for her daughter. It is not clear if her daughter is with her (though in Mark 7.30 she is at home). It is also not clear what the disciples mean by ‘dismiss her’ (15.23), whether they are urging him to give her what she is asking for or to send her away empty-handed. Jesus’ reply is: ‘I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (15.24), a saying unique in Matthew (compare Mark 7.25). But, why, then, does he go into pagan territory? Are the ‘lost

sheep’ the whole of the house of Israel, or just some lost sheep within it? Matthew shows that the woman has a respectful attitude towards Jesus (she ‘did homage to him’, and also calls him Lord and ‘Son of David’). Jesus’ response seems a bit harsh, referring to the Israelites as ‘children’ and the Gentiles as ‘dogs’ (though the diminutive, *kynarion* – ‘puppy’ – is used). There is the assumption that they are ‘house dogs’ (15.27). The woman is not put off, though, and continues to ask for help. However, Jesus clearly affirms the traditional Jewish approach to salvation history of Jews first. The woman’s clever response has an effect on Jesus, who then relents and heals the girl. He even compliments her for her great faith (15.28). This incident would have had an important message for the Matthean community, as it had Jewish roots but was engaged in a mission to the Gentiles.

In these days when there continues to be discrimination and prejudice (the Windrush scandal, Black Lives Matter, antisemitism ...), there is a clear message in the church that all are included. There is always an inclination to exclude rather than to include, especially if people are ‘not like us’. In Matthew’s time this must have been a matter of contention between his community and other Jewish-based groups like the Pharisees. After the resurrection it is clear that the gospel is for ‘all the nations’ (Matthew 28.16-20).

Quotations

1

God will save whomever He chooses to save. The Christian should proselytize not because he thinks he can change everybody; he should proselytize because the Gospel being shared is the ultimate act of love: because he thinks he can love everybody.

Healology / Criss Jami. 2016

2

We hear a lot about evangelism today and how the church must pay more attention to evangelism. But mostly evangelism is not what we tell people, unless what we tell is totally consistent with who we are. It is who we are that is going to make the difference. It is who we are that is going to show the love that brought us all into being, that cares for us

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.