**8/20/23**

**It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!**

**Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) Amen.

When initially looking over the Gospel Reading for this week I thought it might be a little more complex and complicated to talk to you all about. However, once I was able to take my temporary blinders off, and once I was able to discard my worry, concern, and temporary confusion I could see where we were going. Unfortunately, when I started my reading and research I was more focused on what was in the parenthesis, the additional text that could be included or not this morning in our reading. I admit that I may have temporarily and solely focused on that, and that unfortunately was causing me to miss out on the entire point.

So, once I got back on track, I found it to be plain and simple you see. It indeed is something I have shared with you all several times whether in Bible Study, when asked questions, or just in general honestly. Now, you might be scratching your head, or turning your head sideways in an effort to try and recall what that is. Okay, I will put it right out there for you… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!! Yes, you heard me correctly. When it all comes down to it, when we question every single thing we do or what others do, when we worry about what is or what can be, when we get confused in various ways, or when we just don’t know where to look…. It really is plain and simple… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!

This world, people, the news, and so-called ritual practices can very easily side track us, or get us off the road temporarily. If you look at the first part of today’s Gospel Reading, you know that part in parenthesis, the disciples needed to hear the story in two different presentations from Jesus. First he told them in a simple manner. Then, when they got caught up with how the Pharisees felt, and when they got lost in the initial presentation Jesus had to get rather blunt with them so they could gain understanding. He wanted to ensure that they really understood that works or practices are not even close to the real heart of the matter. Yes, they are and can be very important, but…. and that indeed is a big but… if you do not do things first and foremost by leading with your heart then nothing really matters! More importantly, we cannot take the blind advice of others, or we might fall into the same pit with the Pharisees, and we might not be able to get out of it!

You know I have been through a lot over the past few weeks at work. I have been dealing with some really sick folks. Unfortunately, at times it has police and ambulances getting called in, and at other times it has medical or other psychiatric providers getting involved as well. However, no matter how frustrated, confused, concerned, or even angry I may get at times there is always something I say… I love what I do. That is one of the truest statements I have made over the years, and I will continue to make it. I indeed do love what I do, or I would not have committed a good majority of my life to it. I have been working in the helping people field since I was 18 years old. I had several jobs in Pittsburgh working with folks diagnosed with Developmental Disabilities. I have also been at my current job at AtlantiCare Behavioral Health PACT Team for nearly 12 years now and have been working with individuals diagnosed with various Mental Illnesses.

Now, just like today’s gospel reading, and especially the part in parenthesis, the short staffing, the work politics, the games, and all the other things that can and manage to side track us at times from the care for self or others really does manage to make things frustrating. All of that really does manage to take a toll on all of us at one point or another. I am forever reminded that all of that can go on in any traditional workspace though. There are always going to be Pharisees in the mix. So, just like Jesus refocused the disciples, I continually remind myself to come back to center as well. I remind myself to come back to the very purpose of why I do what I do, and why I have done it for nearly 23 years now. I love serving… I love helping… I love teaching… I love being counted on… I love what I do and who I serve even in my most tired or frustrated of states. I am forever reminded and I refocus on the fact that I love God, and that I serve God first and foremost. My co-workers and the individuals I serve know that. Sometimes that is because I share that with my words, and other times I just manage to show that through my work, actions, and my commitment to serve and help others constantly on a daily basis.

Remember we talked a few weeks ago about being like God, and showing others your love and concern because that might be the only time they come in contact with God the entire day. He has set the example, and we are to share the love, care, compassion, and concern we have been gifted through him to those who need it and crave it whether they realize it or not. For we are indeed reminded that… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!

Today’s Gospel Reading yet again reminds us why religion, denominations, or simply where we are from or what we look like really does not matter. Yes, we indeed are Lutheran. That common point is what brings us together for Worship each and every Sunday. It binds us together in the various ministries that we commit ourselves to throughout the week. However, it is not the sole and only point of our worship or ministry. God is first and foremost, and if you really think about it we have had, and continue to have visitors, family, and friends sit in these very pews with us or even call into the Conference Call that identify their faith practices as Catholic, Baptist, Born Again, another form of Lutheran, Non-Denominational, and numerous other faith practices or religions. Maybe, just maybe, we have even had some people that are just so curious that they come into our church doors or call into our conference call, and do not have a so-called defined faith practice at all. We also work hand in hand with True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center on several projects, and they work with several other churches and faith groups in the community, and True Deliverance has shared our very building and worship space for several years now. That indeed is what it is all about! I mean as Wayne often says in our Bible Study, that there are several roads to Philadelphia, but we are all going to the same place. We are all walking along on our Christian paths to get back to the Father, to God, to be Kingdom minded in our hearts and those outward words and actions every single day. Sometimes, it is whether we realize it or not, as his calling can be greater than our human actions or reactions. We are all too often reminded that it will and forever be our calling and that… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!

In today’s Gospel Reading we really do get a glimpse into Jesus’ human nature. He was tired, and he needed a break. He only wanted to pay attention to what he felt he was called to do by the father. He indeed was setting some kind of boundary here for a change and sticking to it… or was he? I mean he had a solid out this time. He for sure was not going to be helping the worst of the worst. I mean they could have just called this woman a Gentile in our Gospel Reading today. Instead they went on to utilize the term Canaanite, which indeed held a heavier and more negative connotation. Jesus was going to hold his ground this time and really focus on his call. He was only going to help the people he was called to lead and help. He was not going to burn the proverbial candle on both ends any longer. He was not going to help others who may not even know why he was here, or even possibly deserve his care, compassion, and healing.

However, we get pure persistence and faith on full display in this story whether we realize it or not. We get to witness the true care and nurturing love of a mother. We get to hear not just any rebuttal, but a rebuttal that indeed even shook Jesus a bit. He said no to her three times, but she continued on in a way that many would not. She wanted her daughter healed, and she cried out to Jesus. More importantly she exemplified that indeed… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!

She knew that Jesus even listening to and responding to her put her at this very table that you and I come to each week. She was willing to take on what many may consider a lowly position as a dog and eat the scraps that fell off the table as long as it would help her daughter out. However, what she also realized was that the dog is also loved by the master. The dog is also a loyal companion of the master. The dog gets to eat just like you and I. So she persisted onward, just like a dog might when the owner is having a rough day, but the dog realizes its job to be that companion. She realized her job too, and that was to keep her focus on her daughter. She focused on getting that love and compassion that she knew even a tired Jesus had to give. More importantly, she did not focus on what type of person she was, or what she had done. She stated ““Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!” Notice the humility and respect: she didn’t demand anything of Jesus: she just asked for mercy.” (3) We even learn that “Jesus is changed by the woman’s courageous outpouring of despair and wit. Jesus engages with her in the debate. And Jesus sets down his own ego to concede that she has proclaimed God’s grace in a way that he had not yet seen or taught. Jesus receives grace as we witness his human capacity for growth, compassion, and healing.” (1)

After all, we could not relate with Jesus if we did not get this imagery at times. We could not understand the purpose of his ministry, and our continued ministry as well, if we did not get this story. That is what truly makes our faith even realer than we tend to realize at some points. It is these very stories, where Jesus even has to humble himself, that continue to make our faith and our love and our capacity to understand more and more like his every single day. “Jesus calmed the Canaanite woman’s heart. Jesus healed her daughter of demon possession, when no one else could. It takes humility. It takes repentance. It takes faith. It takes persistent prayer. Don’t give up when He seems to deny you. Great faith keeps crying, and Jesus keeps answering. Jesus is still alive. He is still merciful. He still answers prayers, in His own time and place.” (3) We continually need to remind ourselves that… It All Is a Matter of The HEART!!!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year A 2023

August 20th, 2023

12th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

Great Faith Keeps Crying

Contributed by Joel Pankow on Aug 27, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28**

Jesus teaches his disciples that true purity is a matter of the heart rather than outward religious observances. Almost immediately, this teaching is tested when a woman considered to be a religious outsider approaches him for help.

[10[Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand:11it 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 offense 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.”]

21Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22Just 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.” 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.