

Diocesan Sermon
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - 16th August 2026
The Rev'd Jeni Bedding

Inclusion

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8; Psalm 67; Romans 11: 13-32; Matthew 15: 21-28

Father God may the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable to you. O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

God's love is an inclusive love. When God created the world he saw all he had made and declared it to be good. When he created humanity he declared it very good. Sin entered the world and what was good became tarnished.

The destructive power of sin insidiously infected the future generations until God chose to destroy the Earth through the flood, but he saved humanity through Noah who walked with God. God's plan was to reconcile his people and his creation to himself, and he chose Abram, Noah's descendant, to father God's nation of chosen people, the Jewish nation, the natural branches of God's family tree. The blessing of God's people continued down the family line to Isaac, then Jacob who had twelve sons who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.

God loved the world, not just the Jewish people descended from Abraham, but all people. His grace is offered to all. God's covenant with Abraham, confirmed through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, was that the Jewish people were God's chosen people, who were given the Mosaic Law to live by, and they would be blessed accordingly, and through them all nations would be blessed.

When we look at the lectionary readings for this Sunday they speak of God's generosity, offering his grace to all. We read that famous verse from John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever should believe in him will not perish but will have everlasting life.'

God promised a Saviour who would come first to Israel and then to the world. Our psalmist refers to the Aaronic blessing given to Israel, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, may the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you peace.' This was given to Aaron and his sons to bless the Israelites. Our psalmist though mentions 'all'. We are all included in this blessing, which then encourages us to behave in a worthy manner and to offer God our thanks.

In our Old Testament reading today Isaiah is standing in the temple addressing everyone standing in the courtyard. These include the foreigners and eunuchs, those who had previously being excluded from worship because they were not Jews by blood descended from Abraham.

They have come with open hearts, seeking God, with their sacrifices, eager to learn more about God's promises. They are longing for acceptance and are eagerly waiting to hear the prophet's words.

We are those foreigners, Gentiles, not from Jewish blood, but included in God's family because of our faith, and who live in obedience to God's Law. Then in gratitude to God for his gift of salvation, we share this knowledge with others who need to hear of God's generosity and gift of salvation, his grace and mercy to those who come seeking no matter what their background is. They are more pleasing to God than an Israelite who rejects God's offer.

Paul declares in our New Testament reading in his letter to the Romans that he was chosen by Jesus to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to continue his work in bringing the good news of salvation to all people. When he was preaching to the Gentiles, he was showing the Jews, who had rejected God's invitation, that God would offer salvation to the Gentiles as well. He was enticing them back to God. Since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, all their descendants were holy, for if the roots of the tree are holy, then the branches are as well. Unfortunately, like many family trees, some of the branches had been broken off, as they disobeyed God and rejected his offer of salvation. So, the Gentiles were chosen to be grafted into the tree, sharing the nourishment from the holy roots. Paul tells the Romans that this is to make the Jews jealous of what the Gentiles have got, but he warns the Gentiles that they are not to feel superior to the Jews. Their rejection, because of their unbelief, symbolised by the breaking off the branches has paved the way for the foreigners, Gentiles, the wild olive shoots, to be grafted in.

As God's chosen though they will be grafted back in, there will come a time when Israel is once more restored to God, so we are not to think more highly of ourselves. It is only through God's love and mercy that we have been saved.

Our gospel reading from Matthew continues in this theme when Jesus tells the woman, 'It isn't right to take food from the children and give it to the dogs.'

At first look you might think that Jesus was being racist, precluding the Gentiles, even referring to the woman as a dog. This was a derogative term

that Jews used for Gentiles because the Jews considered these pagan people no more likely than dogs to receive God's blessing. But when we look closely, Jesus was using this opportunity to teach that faith is available to everyone. He was being faithful to God's promise that salvation was first offered to the Jews and then through the Jews it was offered to the Gentiles.

God wanted them to share the gospel, presenting the message of salvation to the rest of the world. To her credit, the woman ignored the slur, that she would have been frequently called, as her faith spurred her on to receive God's blessing for her daughter who was possessed by a demon. She was rewarded for her unerring persistence, and Jesus instantly healed her daughter.

Wow!!! What an example of faith. How often do we cry out to God, only after we have exhausted all our own efforts?

We use it as a last resort, yet this woman risked personal safety and emotional bullying, seeking Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, to heal her daughter. Many Jews would lose God's blessing and salvation because they rejected Jesus as the chosen Messiah, and many Gentiles would find salvation because they recognised and accepted him.

The woman refers to Jesus as 'Lord, Son of David', recognising him as the Messiah. She would fit into the category Isaiah spoke of, 'a foreigner who had joined themselves to the Lord.' Even these foreigners were entitled to the scraps leftover for the dogs. It is thought that with there being no napkins guests were given scraps of bread to wipe their hands on and these were discarded for the dogs to find and eat. What they discarded was a blessing to others. This woman, with a heart for God, knew she was entitled to these scraps of faith.

Remember the twelve baskets left over from the feeding of the five thousand? Even God's crumbs can satisfy us completely. God is generous with his love and grace, we who are his children through faith, should be likewise to all those we meet.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.