

Lectionary 20A - Pericope Study for Sunday, August 20, 2017

Presented Tuesday August 15, 2017 by Richard Burgess

Collect / Prayer of the Day (ELW)

God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord

General Thoughts & Questions for the Week

All four lessons this week deal with varying forms of in vs out and Jew vs Gentile. Is this an opportunity for ecumenical or interfaith discussion? Six years ago when I led pericope study for this week, I was involved in plans with an interfaith group observing the tenth anniversary of 9/11, and these lessons were surprisingly fitting. This week in the aftermath of Charlottesville and much discussion about calling it racism &/o terrorism or not, the same scriptures once again take on ever new relevance and meaning.

Thoughts on Violence, Charlottesville, Racism, etc, in no particular order:

- How can we get people to stop driving cars into crowds?
- Is violence ever justified? Eg, Bonhoeffer's plot to kill Hitler, Jesus' references to swords (eg, Mt 10.34, Lk 22.36), or the LORD's involvement with killing in the OT (eg, Egyptian first born in the Exodus)?
- The problem is not just racism; it is our relationship with "others". Eg, other "races", other gender identities, other handedness, other political parties, other countries, other ideologies, other religions, other socioeconomic classes, other languages, . . .
- When do our opinions as leaders need to be heard and when are they just the opinions of individuals?
- How do we take a stand on issues in preaching and pastoral care without alienating those who disagree?
- We must humbly admit that are all in some measure guilty of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. How can we be aware of the log in our own eye and the speck in our neighbor's and still be able to speak as needed? What about the logs in our eyes we may never be aware of but which are still there?
- How can we as pastors speak prophetically so we contribute to the building of the Kingdom of Heaven, not just justify our opinions or satisfy our perceived emotional needs (or those of our communities)?

Possible Sermon Titles for Lectionary 20A

As usual, use at your own risk.

	Is	Rom	Mt
For All Nations	X		
The gifts of God are What!?!?!?		X	
We are saved because the Jews are saved. Or is it the other way around?		X	
Are the Scraps Enough?			X
Are You a Mangy Cur?			X
Even the Dogs Get Table Scraps			X
Underdogs Win with Jesus			X
All Are Welcome	X	X	X
God's Not Just for Jews (Christians?) Anymore	X	X	X
In Is Out and Out Is In	X	X	X
Insies = Outsies	X	X	X

Isaiah 56:1, 6–8 (NRSV)

^{56.1}Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

²Happy is the mortal who does this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and refrains from doing any evil.

³Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,
“The LORD will surely separate me from his people”;
and do not let the eunuch say,
“I am just a dry tree.”

⁴For thus says the LORD:
To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,

⁵I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant —

⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

⁸Thus says the LORD GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Outline / Structure:

Is 56.1 Maintain justice, then you will receive YHWH's salvation / deliverance
~~Is 56.2-5 Anyone who keeps Sabbath, even a eunuch, is acceptable to YHWH~~
Is 56.6-7 Foreigners who worship properly will have their worship accepted
Is 56.8 YHWH will gather outcasts in addition to those of Israel

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Is 56 Note that this is the beginning of Third Isaiah, ie, when the exiled Israelites come back and find it isn't as perfect as they'd hoped while in exile.

Is 56.1-8 "*Maintain justice . . . I will gather others to them*: Third Isaiah begins with the same kind of openness exhibited in Second Isaiah. Here, foreigners and eunuchs who "maintain justice" (56.1), "keep my sabbaths" (56.4), and "hold fast my covenant" (55.6) are fully admitted to the community of God's people. To them is extended the "everlasting sign" promised forever to Israel (55.13). Biblical law had excluded eunuchs (males whose sexual organs had been removed) from the assembly (see Dt 23.1; Lev 21.18-20), but that prohibition is now surprisingly lifted. And foreigners are now assured of their welcome in God's house, "a house of prayer for all peoples" (56.7; see also Mk 11.17). Here, membership in God's people is a matter of commitment, not merely of heritage. During the exile, when temple worship was impossible, keeping the Sabbath had gained in importance as a mark of God's people (58.13-14)." (Lutheran Study Bible)

Is 56.1 *right . . . deliverance*. These are the same Hebrew word" *tsdqh*. (The NIV translates it as "right" and "righteousness".) Compare "deliverance" and "righteousness".

Is 56.1 What is God's *salvation* and/or *deliverance*? Is it in this world? After death? "Eternal"? What does it mean for your congregation in their context?

Is 56.2-5 Why are 56.2-5 left out? Overly titillating word play about eunuchs? What are the pros & cons of including these verses?

Is 56.6-7 It would appear that non-Israelites have to obey the law to be accepted by YHWH. What does this mean in light of our Lutheran understanding of justification by grace through faith? How might this affect your preaching? Evangelism?

Is 56.7b *for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*. Jesus quotes this when he cleanses the temple in Mt 21:13 || Mk 11.17 || Lk 19.46, though the *all peoples* part is left out in Matthew and Luke.

Is 56.8 *outcasts of Israel* "The Israelites are reminded that they were "outcasts" themselves when God saved them. So, they are to remember this when God gathers "others", such as the foreigners and eunuchs to be part of the worshipping community." (Lutheran Study Bible) How does the reality that the vast majority of us Christians are outsider goyim grafted into God's people affect the way we view "the other"?

Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32 (NRSV)

¹¹I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. . . . ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Outline / Structure:

Rom 11.1-2a God has not rejected God's "people", ie, the Jews.
Rom 1.29 because God's calling and gifts are "irrevocable", ie, permanent
Rom 1.30 Christians were disobedient and have now received mercy for that disobedience
Rom 1.31 Likewise, nonbelieving Jews are now disobedient and will receive mercy
Rom 1.32 For God wants to be merciful to all

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

How is Paul addressing racism here? Is his argument complete? Ie, What is the particular situation he is addressing? What are his assumptions underlying his argument?

Rom 11.2b-31 Why were 11.2b-28 left out? What could be gained by including them? Lost or obfuscated?

Rom 11.2a, (2b-28), 29 *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew . . . for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* The lectionary has been cut up to make this look like one sentence. Is this OK? Does anything need to be done with this?

Rom 11.29 This seems to say that once God has made a covenant, God is obligated to keep that covenant forever. What does it mean for God to be bound to God's word? Is it really that simple? Are there any exceptions?

Rom 11.29 *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* How is this related to our baptismal calling?

Rom 11.30-31 Can you sort out the cause and effect here? The time sequences? Are these verses saying that Jews and Gentiles need each other?

Rom 11.31-32 "ultimately what drives Paul's thought is less his theism and the need to rationalise events to show God is in . . . but rather his notion of God as compassionate. . . . He has no idea how - it is "a mystery" - but he insists: all Israel will be saved (11:25-26). . . . Paul finds it hard to believe that God could ever write Israel off and he knows the answer is not really to say: well, Christian Jews only will be saved." (Loader, Bill, "First Thoughts") Does this undermine Paul's argument?

Rom 11.32 What has God caused to happen and for what reason? Does this have significance for theodicy discussions? Universal salvation? Are theodicy and universal salvation related?

Rom 11.32 *For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.* This could seem abusive, even sadistic, to some with traumatic histories.

Matthew 15:[10–20] 21–28 (NRSV)

¹⁰Then (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.

Outline / Structure:

Mt 15.10-20	Things that defile
Mt 15.10	Jesus: called the crowd to him and said, Listen and understand:
Mt 15.11	What comes out of the mouth defiles, not what goes in.
Mt 15.12	Disciples: You offended the Pharisees!
Mt 15.13-14	Jesus: If they aren't from God, they'll be uprooted; leave them alone, they'll never last
Mt 15.15	Peter: Explain this to us (ie, I don't get it.)
Mt 15.16	Jesus: You (pl) still don't get it?
Mt 15.17	What goes in the mouth goes thru the alimentary canal and into the drain / sewer.
Mt 15.18	What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart (=mind) & makes real sewage!
Mt 15.19	Out of the heart come all kinds of evil and sin.
Mt 15.20	This makes one unclean, not not washing ones hands.
Mt 15.21-28	A Canaanite Woman's Faith
Mt 15.21	Jesus left Galilee and went to Phoenicia
Mt 15.22	Canaanite woman asks Jesus to exorcise her daughter
Mt 15.23a	Jesus ignores the woman
Mt 15.23b	Disciples: She's annoying us; send her away.
Mt 15.24	Jesus: Not my job. I was sent to the Jews, not your kind.
Mt 15.25	The woman persists: "Lord, help me."
Mt 15.26	Jesus: It wouldn't be right for me to give dogs like you the children's (Jews') food.
Mt 15.27	Woman: But even the dogs get table scraps.
Mt 15.28a	Jesus: You have great faith! You get your request.
Mt 15.28b	The girl was healed instantly.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Mt 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 pagan and unclean approaches him for help.” (“Sundays & Seasons” for 2011) How did Jesus do in the test of what came out of his mouth?

Mt 15.10-20 || Mk 7.14-23.

Mt 15.10-20 These verses were not in the old (LBW) lectionary. What are the merits of using verses 10-20 or not? Why was 15.21-28 chosen as the primary portion of the text?

Mt 15.11, 18, 20 *defile / koinoi* “to render (ceremonially) unclean, defile, pollute”. (Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*) Or, to make “common” (Latin: “vulgar”). Does something being common or ritually unclean make it evil or a sin?

Mt 15.11, 18, 20 *defile* Psychologically, defilement is related to disgust; What disgusts us? One understanding of “abomination” is “disgusting”. What are abominations to us?

Mt 15.20 *unwashed hands* This whole chapter got started when in Mt 15.2 the Pharisees and scribes complained that Jesus’ disciples didn’t wash their hands before eating.

Mt 15.21-28 || Mk 7.24-30.

Mt 15.21-28 Interesting Contextual Chiasm:

Mt 14.13-21	Feeding of 5000
Mt 14.22-36	walking on water and healing people at Gennesaret
Mt 15.1-20	tradition & `what is clean / unclean, ie, in / out
Mt 15.21-28	Jesus reluctantly feeds a dog and heals her daughter
Mt 15.29-31	Jesus heals many people at the Sea of Galilee
Mt 15.32-39	Feeding of 4000

Mt 15.21-28 “quite frankly, Jesus does not come off well in this encounter with the Canaanite woman. It is tempting to justify Jesus’ unseemly behavior or pretend we did not see it. If we can resist this temptation to save Jesus, and us, from embarrassment, we might discover some new insights in the Gospel story of Jesus as Matthew tells it.” (Salmon, Marilyn, “Working Preacher” for 2008)

Mt 15.21 *left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon* ie, from Galilee near the Sea of Galilee (home, Jewish, and friendly territory) north northwest to Phoenicia (roughly modern Lebanon; foreign, Gentile, and historically unfriendly, territory).

Mt 15.22, 28 The woman asked for an exorcism (.22) and got a healing (.28). Did she get what she wanted?

Mt 15.22-23 the woman’s “pleas are matched by the shouts of the disciples, “get rid of her!” (in the original Greek their words are an alliterative and ironic echo of the woman’s cry: *apolyson*). With dramatic effect the story sets before us a Jesus flanked by two competing choruses: on one side one lone creature crying “*kyrie eleison*,” and on the other a band of bullies shouting her down with their “*apolyson*.”” (Boyce, James, “Working Preacher” for 2011)