

## Week of June 20, 2021

### Matthew 15:1-28

<sup>1</sup> Then Pharisees and legal experts came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> “Why are your disciples breaking the elders’ rules handed down to us? They don’t ritually purify their hands by washing before they eat.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “Why do you break the command of God by keeping the rules handed down to you?” <sup>4</sup> For God said, Honor your father and your mother, and The person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death. <sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘If you tell your father or mother, “Everything I’m expected to contribute to you I’m giving to God as a gift,” then you don’t have to honor your father.’ <sup>6</sup> So you do away with God’s Law for the sake of the rules that have been handed down to you. <sup>7</sup> Hypocrites! Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you, <sup>8</sup> This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. <sup>9</sup> Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human rules.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus called the crowd near and said to them, “Listen and understand. <sup>11</sup> It’s not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God’s sight. It’s what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person.” <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you just said?” <sup>13</sup> Jesus replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be pulled up. <sup>14</sup> Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. But if a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch.” <sup>15</sup> Then Peter spoke up, “Explain this riddle to us.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said, “Don’t you understand yet? <sup>17</sup> Don’t you know that everything that goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? <sup>18</sup> But what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight. <sup>19</sup> Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults. <sup>20</sup> These contaminate a person in God’s sight. But eating without washing hands doesn’t contaminate in God’s sight.”

<sup>21</sup> From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from those territories came out and shouted, “Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.” <sup>23</sup> But he didn’t respond to her at all. His disciples came and urged him, “Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us.” <sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.” <sup>25</sup> But she knelt before him and said, “Lord, help me.” <sup>26</sup> He replied, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and toss it to dogs.” <sup>27</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup> Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish.” And right then her daughter was healed.

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### A Lesson Learned

The Pharisees constantly attempted to trap Jesus, and they constantly failed. In the case of Matthew 15, Jesus turned the trap into a lesson for his disciples - he knew he couldn’t change the minds of the Pharisees who were so focused on hating him, so he turned his attention to correcting the mistruths they spread. In this case it was a question of what “contaminates” a person - what one does to purify themselves vs one’s actions. Jesus maintained that ritual - the act of purification - was empty unless one lived up to the same expectations in all their lives. It’s a pretty simple lesson, not at all difficult to grasp. But grasping the idea is different than living it, because living it is difficult. Luckily, it wasn’t long before an occasion presented itself where they could see just how it was to be lived - as a Canaanite woman approached them.

If you’ve read any of the Old Testament, you’ll know that the Canaanites were not well liked by the Israelites. They occupied the land God had promised Israel and practiced a kind of religion that Israel found to be detestable. In the hundreds of years since the Israelite’s first interactions with them, things had not changed, even through all the upheaval the region had undergone in that time. Good Jewish Palestinians did not interact with Canaanites. It stands to reason, then, that Jesus’ disciples wanted him to send this Canaanite woman away, even as she called him ‘Son of David,’ a name synonymous with “messiah.” In this situation, the disciples fell back into their most basic instinct, to keep their distance from “those people.” Jesus, being God incarnate and thus all knowing, knew who this woman was and her intentions, so he let the encounter play out in order to teach his disciples a lesson. The woman wouldn’t be denied an

audience with Jesus, so she kneeled at his feet with a direct request for help for her sick daughter. Jesus gave the response expected of him, saying the thing the disciples were thinking out loud - if she, a Canaanite, were to receive help, it would remove the help he was supposed to give the Israelites. Jesus even threw in a common epithet for Canaanites, calling her a dog. But she was not deterred, coming back with her own response and showing how even a little of God's grace was enough. Jesus applauded her great faith and her daughter was healed. In this encounter, Jesus showed a lived expression of love and grace. He had announced God's free grace to all who trusted, and here he showed it wasn't just nice words, but real. In the same way, we are to live into all the things we profess. Faith isn't going to the right church, giving the right amount of money, saying the right words, it's about living out what is professed.

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*Gracious God - though we contaminate our lives in many ways by refusing to love as you have loved, you have still offered us grace. May we live into the love we have received, allowing our actions to be informed by the faith we profess. In Jesus' name - Amen.*