

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

LOOKING FOR FAITH IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Matthew 15: {1-9} [10-20] 21-28

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Analysis by Chris Repp

{Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.” 3He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4For God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ 5But you say that whoever tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,’ then that person need not honor the father. 6So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. 7You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 8 ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’”}

[10Then he 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.

Note: As is often the case, we need more of the text than we are given (even in the optional [square bracketed] verses 10-20) in order to make sense of this pericope. I have added verses 1-9 {in brackets} for our consideration.

DIAGNOSIS: Offense Given

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Lip Service

The hyper-religious boast of their love of God and their superior morality. How do we know it’s superior? Well, just compare them with everyone else! Just look at what sort of people they are – nice, clean, well-spoken. I like how much they

talk about those good old traditional values of our society. And just look at how much better they are than the ones who flaunt those values. See how dedicated they are to their cause, how uncompromising – willing to battle the decay of morality at any cost and lead us all back into God's favor by purifying us from our transgressions. They seem very sure of themselves. Maybe we should follow them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Distant Hearts*

But here's Jesus. He's telling them off. They make a show of their piety and their purity, these self-appointed, pedigreed arbiters of societal values, but it's all talk and manufactured morality. As Hamlet's mother noticed, "the lady doth protest* too much." They talk a good game and put on a good show, but there's something missing. Their heart is not in it. The piety and morality they espouse are self-serving, and when they are called out on their hypocrisy they take offense. Maybe we shouldn't be following them after all.

* "Declare emphatically in the face of doubt."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Into the Pit*

Jesus is still laying into them: The self-serving, who cannot serve two masters (see 6:24), also cannot lead us, or even themselves, back into God's favor. Their leadership is blind, careening into a pit. And it's even worse than that. They are uprooted – cut off from God whom they claim to love. Great. This is the pits. I knew we shouldn't have followed them. Now we're uprooted and cut off too. How will we get out of this?

PROGNOSIS: Offense Taken

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Out of the Depths*

But wait, there's someone else down here besides the blind guides and their unwitting followers: someone even further down in the pit than we are. It's a woman, one of those dirty

foreigners. No surprise one of them would be down here. What's she sniveling about? And who's she talking to anyway? Hey, it's Jesus! What in Hell is he doing down here? Ha, ha, he just called her a dog. You tell her, Jesus. What a pathetic excuse for a human being. She's still talking, though. Some people just don't know when to shut up. But look, now it's Jesus who has shut up. He has no witty retort for that? Is he really going to let her win? How could he possibly stoop that low? But that is exactly what he does.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Great Faith*

Hold on, now he's climbing out, and he's pulling her up with him. And complementing her! Great faith indeed. What an alarming turn of events. One of those people and Jesus. Who would have thought it? (Only those who see themselves in the same lowly predicament as her; in need of One whose crumbs are enough to feed the soul.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Healed Lives*

He does what she asked. He has mercy on her. Her daughter is healed. Her life is restored. Look how happy she is. Look how she hugs the girl. What wondrous love. I want what she has. Don't you? Maybe we should follow her example-living as if Jesus is our only hope.