



Child of God
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
August 20, 2017
5:00 p.m., 8:00 a.m., 12 Noon, 5:00 p.m.
Church of the Holy Angels

1. When I was associate pastor at St. Christopher's in Rocky River we used to host a monthly dinner at St. Colman Parish near W. 65th and Lorain Ave.
 - as you might imagine, it was a real culture clash – neighbors from the wealthier suburb to the west and a mixture of everything at St. Colman – black, white, Muslim, Christian, non-Christian – a real hodgepodge of cultures and races and poverty levels
 - for some of the parishioners the table that separated those serving from those being served provided a comfortable barrier, a protection from any awkwardness or they felt
 - with poverty, it's easier to be on the giving end, to be generous
 - it's a lot harder to humbly receive; or to accept the generosity of another
 - often it was easy to know who the givers were and who the receivers were
 - but one day the 8th grade football team came to volunteer
 - these kids had no qualms about sitting with the folks, getting to know them, hearing their stories, explaining their football uniforms, listening to jokes, laughing with each other
 - for the kids, there was no separation between “them” and “us”
 - no discomfort at all – no fear or worry about differences
 - that day those 8th graders taught me an important lesson about real unity and what it takes to break down barriers and to confront our prejudices

2. This week has been a difficult one for our nation and for our world
 - the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia last weekend and the horrific terrorist attack in Barcelona leave us wondering “What is the world coming to?”
 - We may wonder, “How is it possible to move forward? How are we to respond?”
 - Why does hate and prejudice and racism and fear divide and separate us from one another and from God?
 - why can't people see the common human bond that unites us? How can we make a difference in this crazy world?

3. The story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew's Gospel can be, on one hand, troubling, and, on the other hand, hopeful
 - Jesus, at first, refuses to help a desperate woman because she's a Gentile, an outsider, a woman whose people were commonly considered “dogs”
 - Jesus being both “fully human” and “fully divine” is shaped by his culture
 - like every culture, Jewish culture had some stories that were based on prejudice
 - Jews and Canaanites were enemies
 - Jesus reflects that he had been sent only for the sheep of the house of Israel

- but the woman persists, she never gives up
 - she confronts the barrier, the prejudice, her need knows no hurdles
 - she would do anything to fight for her daughter to be well; to be free of bondage
4. - and (here's the hopeful thing) Jesus changes course
 - he recognizes her faith; and draws his disciples into a larger understanding of what it means to be human; and how each person deserves to be cared for; healed; and loved
 - her faith gives her a perseverance; and Jesus is moved to hear her plea and then to teach others by his example
 4. The Canaanite woman embodies the universal quality that every human heart – Jew or Gentile, woman or man, slave or free – possesses
 - it was her willingness to call out in faith to God
 - this power is given to each of us in our mother's wombs
 - we are born dependent
 - from the time of Sarah and Abraham to Mary's yes and Joseph's word of trust
 - from Romans to rabbis, Africans to Indians, we have been given life from God
 - and it is this gift which unites us to one another
 - we have a common need to trust, to hope, and to pray
 5. So, what do we do to change the world? We begin by changing ourselves!
 - I once heard a story about a rabbi who would ride the subway each day to work
 - the things he witnessed made him angry and bitter and negative
 - people not giving up their seat for the elderly or the handicapped
 - people pushing each other for the door entrance, some ignoring a person in need
 - he found himself becoming less sensitive, uncaring, and less kind to people
 - and finally, one day, it dawns on him – each of these people is a child of God
 - and he began to say to himself, "Child of God, Child of God, Child of God."
 - soon each person was no longer an idiot, or a bully, or a jerk
 - each was a "child of God, child of God, child of God."
 - soon it transformed his way of seeing and it changed his heart
 - he no longer became the very hate he hated
 6. We can't begin to change the world unless we first change our own hearts
 - to not so much fear or judge or criticize another
 - until we first remember that, underneath it all, each is a child of God
 - even Jesus came to understand the Canaanite woman and her daughter were no less deserving than his own tribe and clan
 - each created in the image and likeness of God