

## God's Unconditional Love

Once again, I stand before you humbled and honored to open God's word and share it with you.

Now may our Creator and the Creator of the universe who holds all things together show us how to apply these scriptures this morning to our daily lives. Please be seated.

I learned a few weeks ago that September was creation care month. My first response was I can't preach this month. What are the new scriptures passages? To my surprise the scriptures had not changed. I then continued to mull over the different scriptures for today and pray earnestly how and what I was to share today as I found so many different directions I could take. I have to admit I am glad I have the passages in this week's lectionary and not what Reverend Mike had last week. He did a fantastic job of opening God's word to us.

I am not going to preach on creation care. However, I would like for you to enjoy this short video clip showing us how we are all connected by love. (Video clip) I believe it is our responsibility to do what we can to keep our ocean waters and all waters from toxins that would harm

God's creation. We can go a step further and do our part to keep our total environment free from toxins and pollutants. As I pondered creation and today's scriptures, I was reminded of a children's song with the lyrics "I've got peace like a river, I've got joy like a fountain and I've got love like an ocean." I've added another verse Makes me love everybody. I will come back to this song later to relate to our scriptures.

Jesus has demonstrated to us over and over again His unconditional love for us no matter who we are, where we came from, what we have done or not done, and what we are going through. Our inclusivity statement says it well "Our welcome(love) knows no boundaries of age, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, economic condition, or physical or mental ability." I believe Jesus is a classic example of our inclusivity statement.

In our Proverbs reading today we are reminded not judge people by their economic condition and to demonstrate true social and moral justice to the poor.

At first glance in our gospel reading today, it appeared to me that Jesus was judging the Syrophenician woman by calling her a dog. I found myself wanting to defend Jesus.

Then I went to the expert commentators and found out that they disagreed on what the word dogs meant. Some said it was Kunarion meaning puppy. This would make Jesus' words softer. Others said it was the word Kuon meaning metaphorically Gentiles, all people who were not Jews. Still others said it was Kuon meaning a literal dog which would have been a derogatory term to refer to someone. I went back and read last weeks gospel passage where Jesus had a lengthy discussion with the Pharisees regarding clean and unclean and not judging others for their standards of purity. So, what does Jesus do he heads to Tyre, which is predominately Gentile territory or what Jews would call unclean territory. This is about 35 miles from where he was which would have taken 11 or 12 hours walking. He appears to be exhausted and just wants to get away. Mark 7:24 "as he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice." Then here comes this mom wanting her daughter delivered from demons. Somehow this Tyre woman knows Jesus is capable to do this and has witnessed or heard of his compassion. She is brave as she has several barriers that would keep her from approaching Jesus. She is a Gentile (unclean), she comes without a husband or man to speak

to an unknown man(taboo) and her daughter is demon possessed. I believe Jesus was showing his human side when he responded to her. He was tired and he was grumpy. He was being derogatory. He was pretty blunt many times when he confronted people on their hypocrisy. He called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” Matthew 12:34, In Matthew 23:27-28 he said the Scribes and Pharisees were like “whitewashed tombs.” Jesus called things for what they were. He never said he wouldn’t deliver her daughter. He just said not the time. It wasn’t yet time to offer The Kingdom of God to the Gentiles. He proclaimed in Matthew “I was only sent to the lost sheep to the house of Israel.” She never defended herself, but just expressed “Yes Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs under the table.” She knew the leftover blessings were for the gentiles that believed. I believe with her answer he was moved with compassion and love. He delivered her daughter. I wonder if he planned on delivering her daughter at that time? If her answer would have been defensive or different would he have healed her? Did she change his mind on the timing because of her faith? Can we change the mind of God? It has been recorded in the Old Testament more than once that God changed His mind as seen when Moses came

before him and pleaded for God's children in Exodus 34:14, Jonah in Jonah 3:9, and Abraham's extensive conversation with God in Genesis 18:16-33. It is implied that his disciples are with Him observing that God's kingdom and love are going to be offered and given to all.

From there he moves with his disciples to Decapolis, another long journey to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is also predominately Gentile territory. Is Jesus seeking rest again or does he realize his timetable has been moved up for the Gentiles? This time a group of people bring him a deaf and mute man asking for him to heal him. He doesn't address any of them the way he did the Syrophenecian woman. Instead of just saying he was healed he took him aside and put his fingers in his ears and said "be opened." He spit on his hands and made mud and touched his tongue. Then the man heard and spoke plainly. Jesus touched the man. Human touch is very intimate. Jesus asked them to keep quiet about the healing. How could they? They were overjoyed with joy like a fountain. They felt the love of God like an ocean. The man, too was filled with peace, joy and love. Will you sing this chorus with me?

Once again, in these two incidents, Jesus was demonstrating his unconditional love to the outcast, not just the Episcopalians, I mean House of Israel.

How do we at St Ben's offer God's love to the world outside of our walls? We have Laundry of Love, Earth Care, Prado, Community dinners, Discovery Team outreach? Do we do these things out of obligation? Do we see them as us and them? A few weeks back Brother Dennis came and shared a message about love that demonstrated that he saw himself as equal to the ones we would consider on the margins. It was etched into my mind and heart how he spoke of each homeless person by name. He took the time to get to know them. Yes, he gave them some food when needed. But more importantly he saw "that they needed to be seen-that they feel a part of the community. We all need to be fed with dignity and a sense of belonging." Sometimes just addressing the store clerk by their first name is an act of unconditional love. Giving someone in more of a hurry than yourself your place a line could be an act of unconditional love. A smile and a hello could be a demonstration of unconditional love. Having a presence at community events and be open for conversation and prayer if wanted can be an act of unconditional love.

Before Covid, I served at a few of the Community dinners. Once all were served we served ourselves and sat with others at a table and ate with them. We had discussions and there was no difference between them and us. We were all just having a meal together. We did the same thing at Prado. What are our barriers to doing something like that? Covid? They might have not washed their hands? They might not have clean clothes on?

Did we forget that “perfect love casts out fear?”

Let’s continue to bask in God’s unconditional love for us and share it with others every chance we get. Amen