

## Sermon Trinity 11 (20th in Ord) year A

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7, Romans 11:13-15, 29-32, Matthew 15:21-28

### *God's game at home and away.*

Neither Spain nor England have the advantage of a home game today in the Women's World Football Cup – we'll see who takes home the prize. We have the aphorism in our language and culture that charity begins at home. It is an understandable sentiment. Charity which is another translation of love, to be real does, like a pebble thrown into the pond start it work close at hand – though it does not stop there. I'm sure we have all come across people who have expressed a range of feelings to their nearest relatives along the lines of I only wish he was as lovely, funny and caring to us in his family as he was to others. We are told in the scriptures that we cannot pretend to love the God we cannot see if we do not love those that we do. On a larger scale we see the tension and debate between priorities of care and charity towards those at home and those far away. The political debates about the level of the foreign aid budget and also how it is spent are one example of how this tension is played out in public life. Many churches in their charity raising and spending like to make a clear distinction and balance between local national and international charities. Wars and migration constantly mess up such attempts at neat division.

There is nothing new in this in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Punctuated throughout Old Testament is the need to care for orphan widow and foreigner in the midst. The chosen people of God – the Israelites are not possessors of God – he possesses them and calls them to be a light and a beacon to His ways and kingdom. They are Gods instruments and yet as shown by the prophets they often seek to make God their instrument. This is the tension behind the story of Jonah and also God's use of non-hebrews in the scriptures to achieve his purposes.

Our readings today highlight that God's desire for all of the world to be saved – and yes the Hebrews and by derivation followers of Christ – Christians – have a special role to play. In our old testament reading the Israelites learn that foreigners who follow the decrees of the Lord also worship God. The Lord calls for righteousness and justice. Foreigners who love and serve Him, keeping the covenant and observing the Sabbath, will find acceptance in His house - house of prayer fit for all nations.

In our epistle Paul writes to the Church at Rome. It is the centre of an empire of many cultures and nations. We sometimes speak of Paul as the Apostle to the gentiles. Before conversion is the most partisan of Israel centred pharisees – yet now knows what he sees he ought to have known before – God's love, now shown in Christ, is for all people, all places and all times.

It is not surprising that this balance and tension between home and away ministry should also feature in the gospels and the life of Jesus, a Jewish teacher. Both here and also in the gospel of John with a Samaritan women at the well, Jesus has robust almost witty exchange with people who have two characteristics that would cause a more regular Jewish rabbi to walk away from. Being foreign and a woman. He never does walk away for he always meets people as they are in all their differences. And he will always call them on to grow change and embrace the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel the Canaanite woman pleads for Jesus' help, seeking healing for her possessed daughter. Though initially hesitant, Jesus praises her great faith which is teased out through her "scraps under the table" quip. Her daughter is healed instantly.

There are many qualities we can draw from. There is faith and Persistence as the woman's unwavering faith and persistent plea show the role of trust and perseverance in our relationship with Jesus. Despite initial challenges and seemingly discouraging responses, she remains steadfast in seeking Jesus' intervention. Her faith is not just manifest to Jesus – he would have known it – it is manifest to those onlooking in shock at his engagement with this woman. She has humility and is open to learning from him – in a way many Israelites will not. She acknowledges Jesus' authority and power. How interesting it is that only in Matthews very jewish gospel do we hear of the foreign Magi bowing down to him at the beginning of his earthly life.

There is true inclusion to be found in this Gospel. Here Jesus encounters a foreign Canaanite woman seeking help not for herself but her demon-possessed daughter. Despite cultural barriers and the initial response of the disciples, Jesus shows inclusivity by engaging with her and addressing her needs. God's love is for all people, it transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries. The encounter emphasises that God's compassion reaches to all, regardless of their background gender nationality and much else.

Jesus's mission is no different though there is not a different gospel for different types of people – it is the same. His mission is to restore us ; to restore God's image in us and draw us into the same family. This encounter with the Canaanite woman emphasises Jesus' mission to restore and heal all humanity.

By showing mercy and granting the woman's request, Jesus demonstrates His divine power to bring healing and deliverance to those in need.

In Christ charity may in a sense start at home but never stops there – because His home, God's home, has no borders and limits. As we are fed in our membership of His life, His team, at the altar, we do well to remember that wherever we are - its always a home game. It won't necessarily make it easier but it might give you some of the grit, perseverance and faithfulness of the Canaanite women as you play on.

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