

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 08.17.14 Pentecost 10a

Day One: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer...”

Xenophobia, that’s the fancy word for a fear of foreigners or strangers. Most of us would say we think people from other places are interesting... and yet, when it comes to inviting them into our homes, or our lives, or our church... maybe not so much.

When was the last time you invited someone into your home that you don’t know well? New people are interesting to meet at work or in a store, but can you think of reasons not to invite them to dinner?

The house isn’t clean. They might not like the food we eat. They’re probably too busy. Reasons come easily.

But the truth is, most visitors from other countries report that their best experience was being invited into an American home to experience ordinary American life. In our case, we hope, ordinary Christian family life. Unfortunately, very few have that experience even if they have lived or studied here for years!

We don’t *dislike* others, but we like to keep our little circle a safe and comfortable place. God has a different viewpoint.

It’s not just a law about courtesy. God has a passionate love for those he created, and that’s what he calls us to have – not just an interest in foreign foods and cultures. He wants us to love others enough to widen our circle.

God will bring foreigners, like you, into his heaven. How can you welcome more people into your life, or your home? How can we make others more welcome in our church?

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for my family. But I pray, help me to make it a larger family as I embrace more and more of those whom you love. Amen.*

**Day Two: Romans 11:1-2a,
13-15, 28-32**

¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?...

²⁸As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Paul welcomed gentiles for two reasons: one, because Jesus died for them, and two, because he hoped that by seeing even the gentiles come to the Messiah that God's people, the Jews, would also be saved.

Now most Christians are gentile, and very few are Jewish believers in Jesus. The many Jewish people who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were soon assimilated with their Gentile fellow believers and ceased to be seen as Jews. Only those who continued to reject Jesus still preserved the Jewish way of life, the Hebrew

language, et cetera. Today when we read the Bible we almost forget that it was written to a different audience, and that we were once the outsiders.

But God's calling and promise are still the same, still held out to those who are outside, both Jew and Gentile. And we who know the Savior, we who are "inside" are called to reach those who do not know him.

Do you also desire the people of Abraham to come home to the Savior? How might the church be strengthened if more of Abraham's descendants were a part of our fellowship and family?

Paul spent his life reaching the Gentiles with the good news of salvation, but he also passionately desired his own people to be saved. We might devote much of our effort to reaching certain people whom God leads to our ministry, but we should earnestly desire the salvation of others too.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, we open our doors each week. Help us to open our hearts and our arms to receive those whom you love, and to love them too. Amen.*

Day Three: Matt 15:21-28

²²*And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."*

²³*But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* ²⁴*He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

This story seems strange and outrageous to us. It doesn't sound like the Jesus we know from other stories. Instead of having compassion, he totally ignores this poor woman. And then, when the disciples bring her to his attention, Jesus says that he was not sent to help her or anyone of her nationality. That doesn't sound like the Jesus who healed the centurion's servant, and who proclaimed the Roman soldier's faith to be greater than any he had seen among God's people, the Jews.

We're puzzled by Jesus' behavior here. And yet, aren't there lots of times when it seems to us as if God is ignoring our prayers in just the same way?

Sometimes God seems silent, and our problems just go on and on. The illness does not improve, the medicine doesn't work, and another surgery is scheduled. Our life does not turn around, a lost friendship is not restored, and we still feel sad.

And yet, Jesus was listening, wasn't he? Even while he refused to answer, he was listening. And even when he, at first, declined to help her, he did desire deliverance for this woman's daughter.

But there was something he desired even more than her healing. He wanted this woman and her child to truly know him and be eternally saved.

Why is God sometimes silent in your life? Which of your prayers are you still waiting for him to answer? Is it possible that Jesus is listening, but that he has a more important goal for you? Is it possible he is using your prayers and your need to change others as well?

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, I know you love me, and you listen to me. Grant that I may hear you also, and follow you forever. Amen.*

**Day Four: Hymn #833
(LSB) “Listen, God is
Calling”**

*Listen, listen, God is calling
Through the Word inviting,
Offering forgiveness,
Comfort, and joy.
Jesus gave his mandate:
Share the good news
That He came to save us
And set us free. Listen...*

This wonderful hymn comes from our brothers and sisters in Christ in Kenya. Like many African songs, it is in the form of a “call and response.” Calling back and forth, the word is echoed to the whole community that God has a great gift, a gracious invitation, a wonderful surprise.

Here it is translated into English for us, but it is sung in Kenya in a language we do not know. But God knows this language, and all languages. And he loves to hear this song about the good news.

“Listen,” the caller invites. And the congregation responds, “Listen, God is calling.” Even from thousands of miles away, God is calling and inviting. And like the call and response of this hymn, God desires us to echo his call

and to share the good news, and to welcome the lost.

God is offering forgiveness to those who have sinned. How else can they escape their guilt?

God is offering comfort to those who are suffering, who have been injured in body, mind, and spirit by their sins and the sins of others. We are wounded. But God’s forgiveness is soothing.

God is offering joy to those who are sad. Our guilt makes us utterly alone. But God calls to us to come to him and find joy, not just from getting stuff, but from being one with him once again.

“Jesus gave his mandate: share the good news.” Do you have a song to sing? Do you have a call to repeat so that the people in your life hear it and know about God’s love for them?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you called me. Now, Lord, help me to echo your call – to repeat your words of love, not just to people like myself but to people far away. Amen.*