

Pentecost 11A; August 20, 2017
 Rev Ken Wratten at St. Luke's
 Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
 Psalm 67
 Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
 Matthew 15:21-28

Our granddaughter Kendall is seventeen years old, and this coming week begins her senior year of high school. I remember when she was nine, and she and our daughter Laurie came to our house for a BBQ dinner. Laurie brought an outstanding homemade apple pie. Kendall asked for pie before supper, and Laurie said 'no'. Kendall asked again, and again. As I BBQ'd corn on the cob and burgers, time went by, and more time went by; and Kendall kept asking for that slice of apple pie. Then Laurie said, 'you can have one *small* slice, but then you have to eat your supper; no more pie'. Nobody here has seen perseverance like that from a child, right?

It wasn't really Kendall's words that won her the pie. It was Laurie's love for Kendall that made her change her mind.

Jesus led his disciples from the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee on a 30 mile walk into pagan country, the land of Tyre and Sidon, out on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus wanted to get away from Galilee, where the crowds were getting so big that he couldn't have any private teaching time with his disciples.

Tyre and Sidon were two chief cities of the Phoenicians (now Lebanon), part of the OT land of Canaan. Both were known centers of Canaanite pagan worship of El-father god, Baal-god of rain, Mot-death; child sacrifice. No friends of Israel...

In this setting, Jesus met a non-Jewish woman who pleaded with him to heal her daughter. This is one of the most intriguing stories in the Gospels. The woman changed Jesus' mind about healing her daughter.

Some theologians reject the idea that Jesus would ever change his mind. He is God; and knew the plan for his life from before he was born. So he would never change his mind. I don't see it that way. I see Jesus' human nature discovering that his mission was to engage people, any people, in deepening their faith.

It just does not work for us to put God, or the Son of God, in a box. It does not work to say that he only came for the Jews, or for the Catholics, or the evangelicals, or the charismatics, or the liberals, or the oppressed, or even the Episcopalians. God created our diversity, and celebrates it.

As much as we try to figure God out, and as much as we should try to learn about God, no rule we come up with for who is "in" and who is "out"; nothing will deny God's compassionate response to great faith. Jesus recognized that regardless of where she lived, and regardless of the tradition of her own people, SHE had faith in God, and in God's love. And when Jesus realized her faith, he loved, he blessed,

and he healed. Like my granddaughter's constant cry for apple pie, I don't think it was THE WORDS OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN that won Jesus over; but Jesus loved the FAITH SHE CONVEYED.

After seeing her trust in God, that she was willing to live off the crumbs of God's grace, crumbs that the Jews wouldn't bother to pick up; Jesus changed his mind.

Jesus moved his objective from saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", to saying at the end of his earthly ministry, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt 28:19).

Persistence as a faith community;

- 133 years since the founding of St Luke's.
- Lots of changes in clergy
- Maybe a few controversies through that time??? Persistence in God's love.

Persistence as individuals;

- When it seems like prayers are unanswered (usu. because we want to see something fixed immediately, not in God's time).
- With challenges always dangling for the best use of Sunday morning
- When there are so many competing ways to prioritize the way we live our lives; putting the job first, or even putting ourselves first, instead of putting God at the center of our lives. Persistence in God's love.

The message is clear that God rewards persistence in claiming, and holding onto His love. You and I are called to have that persistence; and we are rewarded with love, and blessing, and healing.

Do a self-check on your persistence of faith that God's love has no boundaries, no exclusions, and no conditions. There is no box you can put God into that limits His love for you.

Don't let your mind trick you that you don't have the strength to claim it.

Learn from the Canaanite woman; God loves you, God will listen,
and God will honor your persistence with His blessing. Amen