

Isaiah 56, Romans 11, Matt 15

There's quite a bit of scandal in our readings today. Our readings explore the inclusion of the gentiles, people like us, into the covenants and kingdom of God. Isaiah proclaims how they will come to the house of the Lord – which was forbidden in the Old Covenant. Paul talks about how God has consigned Jew and Gentile to disobedience that he might have mercy on ALL. And well, you heard that Gospel reading and the scandal there... And before you fall asleep, because I know none of you stay up worrying about Jew and Gentile distinctions, well let's change the frame of reference with a little thought experiment.

Let's say the person receiving the benefits of the kingdom are, not some gentile, but that person you can't stand. That you don't want good things to happen to, that doesn't deserve them.

Let's say it's the person from the other political party who is so misguided and deluded and promotes such evil policies. Surely God can't offer them anything good!

Maybe it's the Christmas and Easter Member who isn't even here right now, like you obviously are, to hear this word. They seem so flippant, they don't care. And they get the same benefits as me, the one who helped build the place, who works so thanklessly behind the scenes?

Or the professed atheist, Richard Dawkins, who has written book after book against God and has led so many into darkness. How would you react to see him offered the covenants, the priceless blood of Jesus, and the Kingdom?

And I would hope we would fall down in tears rejoicing in God's mercy and work should any of these actually, in faith, take God up on the offer – but, maybe some of us don't. Maybe some of us think an injustice is done when the evil receive mercy. When the crimes go unpunished. Maybe there is a shadow in the back of our mind that says, well, I've been here the whole time, Lord, and they get the same gifts...

And that is the nature of the scandal of these verses. The children of Israel, the rightful heirs of the covenants and kingdom see it given to others. Paul says, he's glad that might make some of them jealous, so maybe they will wake up(!) and see there is more going on here.

And that is precisely why you, non Christmas and Easter Christian, ought pay attention. There is more going on in God's plan to save than some club of the "in-crowd." Something more than you. Something far more than me.

God has a plan for the world, and always has. You've heard the verses John 3:16, 1 Tim 2 and 1 Peter, Ezekiel 33, and so many more. And this is where we respond "but you have to repent to receive the benefits! And those people I can't stand are

unrepentant.” And I might say: 1. And was it your good work and effort that brings you to repentance? No, so you don’t get to boast over them. 2. And you have no struggle that still comes to the surface now and again, that an outsider that doesn’t know your sincere struggle with it, might accuse you of being unrepentant? And 3. It is true that not all receive the benefits of the kingdom due to their hard hearts and love of sin – but that is not the same thing as God’s desire to *offer* it to them. And to despise another person for any reason and to hope that they do not *receive* the benefits of the kingdom is to disagree with God’s heart. It is to disagree with God who wants to give them the kingdom.

And so all our excuses are the same as the Jew / Gentile controversy. “Those gentiles (that’s you by the way) don’t belong! They are uncircumcised filth, reveling in sin and debauchery, and idolatry.” And in our readings today God says, “Yeah, and I still want to give them the kingdom.”

And he wants to for that person you can’t stand.

So are you going to agree with God or not?

Someone in the Gospel reading agrees with Jesus. A gentile. She is in desperate need, for someone else, not her own selfish reasons, and she begs the Lord to help her. But he ignores her. And then he calls her a dog. It’s right there. And once again we find ourselves wanting to disagree with Jesus, “don’t say that Jesus!”

And you may have got whiplash there, as I have just said God's plan was for the world and now he's calling a gentile a dog and ignoring her. Doesn't he have a plan to save her too? Of course he does. But keep in mind a few things, 1. The old covenant served to use Israel to make God known to the world, and that covenant had not been fulfilled yet. So Jesus and his disciples primarily go to the lost children of Israel. And 2. Jesus is quite capable of knowing that this woman and her great faith would be recorded in His Word as a beautiful story of God's mercy to the undeserving. And indeed it is. Even as God never turns away, even the most unlikely and underserving who come to him for mercy.

Which therefore actually reinforces the point: Does God's mercy go to the undeserving in the Gospel lesson? Yes! So who are you to disagree with him and say it shouldn't? Like the older brother outside the party when the prodigal son returns – jealous, bitter, angry, thinking he was better when in fact he already had every gift of God – why should he spurn another?

Yet this woman is not the older brother, nor is she sitting on an ivory tower thinking she deserves anything. She is on her knees, at the foot of the table, hoping for crumbs and celebrating that any, any at all, might come her way. And so when Jesus calls her a gentile dog, what does she say? She says "Yes, Lord." She agrees with him. Would you agree if someone called you that?

Speaking of you: You confessed that you are a poor miserable sinner. Is that lip service? Or are you thinking “but not as poor and miserable as the Christmas and Easter family, not as poor and miserable as THOSE people, not as poor and miserable as the atheist?” Folks if that is what you think you do not agree with God.

Romans 11 – He has consigned ALL to disobedience so that he might have mercy on ALL. You are undeserving, no more and no less than anyone else on the planet whether you like it or not. All have fallen short of the glory of God and are justified by the free gift of God.

And yes, yes, we all know that some reject the gifts, sadly. The bible never condones gentile or Israelite sin – In fact Paul often reminds the gentiles they have been rescued from the futile ways in which they once walked (past tense). And Jesus never condones the sin of those he forgives, but he does, as I just said, he does forgive it.

And so when we come before God, lets agree with him. Lets agree that God’s desire is for all to be saved by undeserved mercy and that we with our sins, small or great, are undeserving dogs. But we come here, we come to him, why? Because we will take the crumbs, Lord, please.

And, God be praised, you just might find, his gifts are far more than crumbs. But abundant, overflowing, and that there is plenty for all. Gifts that flow from a cross where we see that evil is not excused, where we see judgment is not passed over, where we see that the crimes do not go unpunished. But that our God in his love would pay that price himself. Talk about undeserved, he didn't deserve that cross, you did. But there he hung so that you might be set free and receive his gifts. Gifts from a cross poured out for the world. And if they are poured out for the world, they are poured out for that person you can't stand, and may we pray they receive them in faith by God's Working. And if they are poured out for the world, they are poured out for you and me. Who think we are better than others. Who don't give others the benefit of the doubt. Who have our own fears and sins. Who have our pride. Or maybe our struggle isn't pride, maybe we are like that poor woman, and life is too much, and nothing good seems to happen to us. All alike we can pray together, "God, give us the crumbs, please."

Well, rejoice, Child of God. It is his good pleasure to give you the kingdom. You need not earn it, you need not fear him. His love is poured out, it overflows. Come partake of it in joy. In joy that wells up to eternal life in His Kingdom, even as our Lord is risen from the grave. And speaks on your behalf.

Because we don't just confess when we come here. The Christian life isn't just confessing how bad and hypocritical we are. Because then we also hear God's

forgiving verdict. The absolution that proclaims that because of what Christ has done – you are forgiven. You are free. You are his.

Do you agree with him? It may seem hard to believe, but, I must remind you, there is no higher court, and our God never lies.

So let's agree with God: We are undeserving, and, in Christ, we receive abundant and eternal gifts.

Amen.