

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 16, 2020.

Text: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 and Matthew 15:21-28

### **“Jesus Word and Actions Eclipse the Law”**

Three years ago, on August 21, 2017, I got to experience a total eclipse in Oregon. People came from all over the globe came to catch a glimpse of this event in Oregon, including the Garman's, from our church.

Eclipses have forever fascinated humanity. In the time the prophet Isaiah wrote our first lesson...6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, archeologists have uncovered stones that the Babylonian astrologers drew on to track eclipses. They wondered what the gods were up to... if the world was coming to an end? They didn't have the luxury of Google or Alexa or Siri. “Is the world coming to an end?” No, it is a total solar eclipse.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus' action of healing a Canaanite woman's daughter was a **total eclipse** of years of generally accepted Hebrew law, tradition, and views against foreigners. Jesus, being fully human, and fully divine, wrestles in a one-to-one encounter with a foreign woman... a gentile. Jesus' humanity is on full display as he fights against long-held beliefs of his people... the Jews... and his understanding of his initial mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel... to his own people... the Jews. But in the end, Jesus ultimately chooses to heal the woman's daughter because of her faith and persistence.

If you haven't noticed... all of our lessons today are about inclusion. They challenge long-held beliefs and when we are stuck in our ways. How many of you have made up your minds about something and will never change? Stay tuned...

In our first lesson from Isaiah 56, the prophet Isaiah casts a new vision of justice and welcome for all. Now that the Israelites are beginning to return home after being in exile in Babylon, Isaiah calls for formerly excluded people like foreigners and eunuchs to now be welcomed to worship in God's temple... that is, of course, if they keep the Sabbath. Isaiah proclaims, “For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Isaiah 56:7. Here, long held Old

Testament law from the Torah (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) were being eclipsed by a new interpretation from the prophet Isaiah to welcome all.

In contrast, in Deuteronomy 23, the law was pretty straight forward. “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (Deut 23:1)... that means no Eunuchs or people with sexual anomalies. “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (Deut 23:3)... no foreigners allowed. But Isaiah calls for a welcome for the formerly excluded.

Then in our Gospel Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman... a foreigner. Canaanites were the indigenous people who were living in the Promised Land when God told the Israelites to move in. They were a despised group of people for Jews. Jews were not supposed to mix or marry Canaanites.

As Lutherans, we believe scripture interprets scripture. We raise up texts that call for grace and the love of the neighbor and inclusion. And especially, we always end with the Gospel... the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus has to be for all people... not just one race over another. Jesus’ word and actions with the Canaanite woman now eclipse the idea that God is only for a select group of people. Jesus came for all.

Recall that in John 1, Jesus is the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:16

In the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter, we see grace. Her daughter has a demon. She is desperate. She shows faith, saying, have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.” She knows her place, but reminds Jesus that Canaanite and Moabite Woman were part of his lineage like Rahab and Ruth. Yes, at first, Jesus dismisses her request and even calls her a dog... a derogatory slur for Gentiles. She argued, “but even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the children’s table.” Which is true, dogs still eat the scraps from the

table. This response stops Jesus in his tracks and he changes his mind about her and grants her request.

What ultimately comes out of Jesus in this story opens the door for all Gentiles to be fully accepted into Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' actions eclipse all other words in scripture because he is God in human flesh. He is the Word of God. All scripture must now be interpreted through Jesus eyes.

Sometimes we get stuck in our ways and in our views. Sometimes we cast others aside because of how we grew up, or of views we learned over time, or of blind systems we are a part of. These scriptures change the course of history. They call out racism and discrimination. They challenge power structures. They say all are welcome.

May God heal our closed mindedness and open our hearts to the possibility of God's love and grace for all. May our communion table represent Jesus revelation that all can eat at his table.

Amen.