



# The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

Post Office Box 441 / 507 Federal Street  
Milton, Delaware 19968



[www.saintjohnsmilton.org](http://www.saintjohnsmilton.org)

The Rev. Thomas M. White

## Homily for The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 20, 2017

Please pray with me: *Creator of all peoples, Father of us all, as your Son was lifted on the cross he embraced us with undying love. Teach us to embody this love as we seek to build bridges, celebrate inclusion, and rejoice in the diversity with which you have created us. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Savior and Lord. Amen.*

It appears as though Jesus is having a bad day. He chooses to travel into Gentile territory and, surprise, meets a Gentile, and so, a foreigner, an unclean outsider, and, to top it off, a woman, someone a self-respecting rabbi like Jesus should have nothing to do with. And Jesus doesn't! He treats her, well, abominably. When she approaches him with respect and downright adulation, begging Jesus for mercy and healing for her demon-possessed daughter, he ignores her. He appears to be listening to his disciples who urge him to send her away. And when she refuses to be dismissed or ignored and pleads her case once again, he insults her, calling her a dog, a horrible and unimaginable put-down. It all feels, frankly, rather awful and nothing like the Jesus we know, respect, love, and worship. This encounter is painful! So, I ask you, what do you think of this Jesus we meet in today's Gospel text? Do you like this Jesus? Is this the Jesus we prefer, the Jesus who excludes, is downright rude, is cold-hearted, without even an ounce of compassion? I hope not!

Biblical scholars have advanced a host of theories regarding Jesus' incivility. He was testing the depth of the woman's faith, or he was attempting to instill a measure of compassion in the disciples by demonstrating how ugly not having it is, hitting them right between the eyes with their prejudice and indifference. Another explanation, though, is this: Jesus, in his humanity, here has his sense of mission enlarged, broadened, pretty much broken wide open, by this Gentile woman's faith, audacity, insistence, and her persistence in demanding Jesus recognize her as yet another child of God. God, the Father, in this encounter reveals to Jesus that his mission is for all people. And so it is that the Gospel of Matthew climaxes, as we said last Sunday, with Jesus' great commission to take the good news of his love to the very ends of the earth. Jesus commands, "Go into all the world...!" Thanks to this woman, who will not be sent away or silenced, God's love and healing overflow and Jesus comes to understand there is more than enough divine love for not just the children of Israel, but for the entire world.

The bottom line is that Jesus, his heart bursting with compassion, of which his cross is the supreme witness, this Jesus feeds the hungry, advocates for the excluded, lifts up the downtrodden, calls despised and outcast tax collectors, and heals the sick of body, mind, and soul, this Jesus marvels at this woman's persistent, never-take-no-for-an-answer faith. "Woman, great is your faith!" And her daughter was healed instantly."

How timely this Gospel reading is for these painful times in which we live. You probably know that the biblical readings you hear read each Sunday are not chosen by me, but are part of a three-year cycle of texts. Today the overwhelming majority of worshipers across this country are hearing, along with us, this Gospel story of Jesus healing the Canaanite woman's daughter, this story of Jesus breaking down whatever walls divide, building bridges of inclusion, his love seeking to draw all, all peoples to himself.

The hatred and violence which took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, last week are despicable and cause for lamentations. For hatred and violence grieve the heart of God. When I say this I hope, I pray, I'm preaching to the choir. You've heard about preaching to the choir. It means trying to convince people who are already convinced. I hope you are already convinced that hatred and violence have absolutely no place in this great land of ours and can in no way make America great.

I am called by the Holy Spirit to preach the Good News of God's love, God's love that created all peoples, including you and me, including African Americans, including Jews, including Latinos, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, created in the very image of God. "Red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in God's sight" is more than a cute Sunday School song; it sings the truth about God's love for us all. Also, I am called to preach the Good News of God's love become flesh and blood in God's Son, Jesus Christ. I am called to preach the Good News of God's love come to us through the Holy Spirit, love that washes us in Holy Baptism and makes us members one of another in the Church, God's family; love that creates faith and feeds faith through God's Word proclaimed in lesson and sermon and incarnated for us in wafer and wine in the sacred Supper. But also, God calls me as the preacher to name sin, to call out evil, and to have the courage to preach the truth of the Gospel wherever the chips may fall. God doesn't call me to be popular, but to be faithful to the Gospel! I pray I'm preaching to the choir when I say this!

I hope I'm preaching to the choir, also, when I say there were no "fine" Neo-Nazis marching with their Ku Klux Klan bigots in the streets of Charlottesville last week, carrying their torches, brandishing their repugnant swastikas and extending the chilling Nazi salutes, like the Nazi rallies of World War II Germany and reminiscent of the Klan rallies of old. I've been to the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. I've stood on that holy ground, commemorating countless American patriots and heroes who shed their sacred blood fighting and defeating Nazi hatred and violence, won victory over the Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust, and there I have wept. Hear this, our nation's leaders must be just as unequivocal in clearly and categorically denouncing hatred and violence. And, if they don't, the judgment of God is upon them. Friends, I hope I'm preaching to the choir!

Let me be unequivocal, no hedging, no maybes, no dog whistles, no wink-winks. Let me say it as clearly as I'm humanly able, let me be unmistakable: there are no "fine" Nazis, no good Ku Klux Klanners, no good anti-Semites, no "fine" bigots, no good white supremacists, no "fine" terrorists! Nazis are anti-Christ; KKKers are anti-Christ, white supremacists anti-Christ, anti-Semites anti-Christ, bigots anti-Christ, terrorists are anti-Christ! I pray, my sisters and brothers in Christ, that I'm preaching to the choir this morning! This is not a matter of being Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative. No, it's much bigger and goes much deeper than party, or political philosophy; instead it goes to the very heart of what it means to be an American, and most importantly, what it means to be an obedient disciple and follower of Jesus Christ! I pray we all can agree always to put country above party, principle above partisanship, but Christ above everything and everyone! I hope I'm preaching to the choir when I say this!

Let us take from this story of the Canaanite woman the vital and life-giving truth that God loves all people of goodwill and bids us to take our stand, with conviction and courage, against those who seek to deny human rights and the dignity of every God-created person. These are the values at the very heart of America's greatness. The Canaanite woman demanded that Jesus see her. "See me as a person," she pleaded, "not as a woman, or a Canaanite, or a minority, or a foreigner, or an outcast. See me as a person," she demanded, "see me as the child of God that I am!" And Jesus did! For us the question becomes, will we? Will we?

† *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*