

Proper 15A
Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
Matthew 15:21-28

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Recently, I bought a box of Crayola's "colors of the world" crayons. I was so excited that I might have let out a little "squee" of excitement before tossing it into my cart. Here it is.

[If you are reading this sermon rather than watching it you can see them here <https://www.crayola.com/worldcolors>].

Thirty-two total crayons. Twenty-four colors representing the variety of skin tones of people around the world and eight classic colors for coloring eyes and hair. Just look at the variety of color shades. This is just awesome. Crayola recognized that, even though they made 120 different colors of crayons, they still lacked the diversity to allow all children to feel included when coloring self portraits or images of people. In their behind-the-scenes video they open with the line, "All kids want to feel represented and included." That is true, not just for kids, but for adults as well. As human beings we want to feel and be included.

This led me to wonder, what would the Church's crayon box look like? What colors does it contain? What colors are lacking or missing? What are the "Colors of the Church"?

We hear in Isaiah today, that anyone- Israelites, foreigners, and outcasts- anyone who loves God, serves God, keeps the sabbath, and who believes in God's covenants will be brought to God's holy mountain. God's house is a house of prayer for all peoples. I suspect this was somewhat disconcerting and difficult for the Israelites to hear. The Israelites tended to be exclusive about who was welcome in their worshipping community. There were strict laws that drew religious lines in the sand separating the in-crowd from the outcasts.

Isaiah proclaims that the line in the sand isn't based upon genealogy, nationality, physical condition, or a whole slew of other things that governed their religious communities. In fact, it could even be said that there wasn't a line in the sand at all. Isaiah is proclaiming God's house to be an inclusive community of faith. Everyone is welcome and included. A person's faith in God and their relationship to God isn't dictated by the petty definitions that human beings try to impose on each other. A person's relationship to and faith in God is dictated by their heart, mind, and soul.

Even though the book of Isaiah was written over two thousand years ago, the passages we read today are still disconcerting and difficult to hear. They force us to remember that it isn't our job to decide who can worship in God's house or who is welcome on God's holy mountain. They

force us to remember that everyone of God's children is welcome in God's house. They force us to take a long hard look at where our churches are lacking in diversity and inclusion, to see where we have drawn lines in the sand excluding some of God's people from our communities of faith.

As difficult as it is to hear the words of Isaiah, where we must confront our own bias. It is even more difficult to hear the words of the Gospel according to Matthew as he describes an encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. Remember that Israelites saw Canaanites as sinners and idolaters, in modern vernacular, they were "bad people". They were about as far from the Israelite in-crowd as you could get. Also, recall that in Jesus' lifetime women were considered to be inferior human beings.

Therefore, the reaction of the disciples to the Canaanite woman is somewhat expected when she has the unmitigated gall to approach and speak to THEIR Lord and THEIR Savior. They rush to Jesus' side and urge Him to send her away. This is truly typical disciple behavior in the Bible. Throughout the Gospels the disciples try to push away anyone that they don't think is worthy of the Good News that Jesus brings.

What isn't expected and I find so difficult to hear, is Jesus' reaction and response to her plea. I cringe every time I hear Jesus say to her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." This is one of those interactions where we see the human side of Jesus showing some of our worst human traits. His words are degrading and racist. His manner arrogant. His attitude is close-minded. His privilege is showing. He had every intent of excluding her from His community of faith.

But the woman is undaunted. Already kneeling before him, she dares to persist in her attempt to receive Jesus' mercy as she flings back a rebuttal, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." In doing so, she opens Jesus' eyes and heart to see her as a fully inclusive member of God's Kingdom. The teacher has become the pupil. Jesus is forced to confront his own prejudice. In doing so, he comes to realize that His ministry spreads beyond the borders of Israel and that He was sent to bring light and hope to the entire world.

As followers of Christ, can we do any less? If we are to truly follow in Jesus' footsteps and to live the life that Christ calls us to live, then we must confront our prejudices and learn to welcome everyone to a full and complete fellowship with Jesus and with each other. No judgement. No lines in the sand of who can or cannot share in the blessing and saving grace of Jesus Christ.

We are called to spread Christ's message of love to all people. Our churches are called to be a beacon of hope and light for the entire world. We can only do that when we stop acting like bouncers at an exclusive club keeping out those we deem as "bad people". As Isaiah says, God's house is a "house of prayer for all peoples." Whether you are brimming over with faith, or have faith no bigger than a mustard seed, or are trying to find faith that was lost, or are seeking faith, or are dubious and have no faith, God's house is open to you. No matter your genealogy, nationality, physical condition, sexual preference, financial situation, or all those other things

that society uses to determine who is in and who is out, you are welcome in God's house and worthy of the Good News that Jesus Christ brings to the world.

The kingdom of God is as diverse as all His children. The number and variety of colors it contains is limitless. If our churches are to reflect the Kingdom of God, then the number and variety and colors it contains should also be limitless. Isaiah and a Canaanite woman challenge us to confront our prejudices and biases so that all God's children are represented and included in Christ's communities of faith. The question is, are we and are our churches ready to accept that challenge just like Jesus.

Amen.