

Title: Got room for one more?
Text: Matthew 15.21-39
Theme: The magnificent compassion of Christ
Series: Matthew #82
Prop Stmtnt: Reflecting Christ means that we always have room in our hearts and lives for another.

Here is the scene: You are new and you walk into an adult bible class in church two minutes late where the people are seated around tables. Every chair around the tables is occupied except one table right up front, where there is an empty spot. The sign on the door says “welcome” so you went in, but when you stood inside the door, only a couple of people glanced your way, while most simply ignored you. Are you welcome there? Not really, at least it doesn’t seem like it in that moment. Is it intentional snubbing? No, it is unintentional snubbing because someone was not intentional about being welcoming. The message seems to be that we really do not care if you are here or not.

Compare that to this: You are new and you walk into an adult bible class two minutes late where the people are seated around tables. Every chair around the tables is occupied except two of the tables near the door. They each have a couple of empty chairs. As soon as you step in someone greets you while a couple of people from each table are motioning you, begging it seems for you to come and sit next to them at their table. The message seems to be, at least initially, that we really care that you are here and want you to belong. Why is it so easy to treat others as if we do not have room for them?

Read Text:

Racism is sinful and ugly. Racism is a frontal assault on the image of God. Racism is the fruit in a life that is expressing the flawed, arrogant and God-offending belief that one human being is fundamentally superior to another. What is it that gives value to a human being? We would argue that human beings have value because they are made by God and in the image of God. One who is a racist, must either deny that all humans were made by God in his image, (which some do) or they must believe that some humans are made in the image of God more than others. God recognizes the races because he made them. The genetic make-up for every single race was in Adam; whom God made in his image. Therefore, every single human being is and has been made equally in the image of God. However, the human race has rebelled against God. Adam and Eve decided that they knew better than God. They acted as if they were morally superior to God and were therefore in a position to decide that they could disobey God and eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They believed that God was not to be trusted. His law should not be trusted, and they believed that they were in a position to make that call. We cannot trust God, but we can trust ourselves. In their heart of hearts, they concluded that they were better than God. That, my brothers and sisters is the origin of racism as it is of all other sins. If I believe that I am better than God, then obviously I am going to believe that I am better than someone else. My heart, naturally tells me this. Your heart naturally tells you this. Our hearts need to be rescued and changed because left to themselves they are factories of lies that we believe and act upon in destructive ways. I am naturally wired

to believe that I am better than you. That is wrong, but that is what an unredeemed heart believes. Apart from Christ, I naturally believe that. So, if I believe that, I am now simply looking for reasons to support that belief. If you look different than me, or if you live in a different country with different habits and cultural norms than me, or if you have more money than me, or less money than me, or more education, or less, etc. then anyone of those surface or circumstantial issues become easy excuses to support my fundamental bias. Therefore, racism is the godless and intellectually bankrupt belief that one human being is superior to another human being because of the color of their skin.

The Bible begins with one couple, one family, one people living in perfect harmony and love together, worshiping and enjoying God in the creation that He made where he fellowshiped with and enjoyed them. The Bible ends with millions of people, people from every tribe, language and nation living in perfect harmony and love with one another, worshiping and enjoying God in the new creation that He makes where he will fellowship with and enjoy them forever. But, in between the beginning and the end is the story of the fall and its effects; brokenness, violence, rage, destruction, isolation and despair. But in the midst of this story, there is a greater story. There is also redemption, promise, evidences of restoration and reconciliation. One of the major subthemes of God's story is the story of race. The OT focuses primarily upon the nation of Israel, while the NT explodes into the world of the Gentiles.

God chose the nation of Israel to be his people. He chose them NOT because they were intrinsically better than anyone else and he told them that. You are not better, he told them in Deut. and through many of the prophets! In fact, God acted in history and time to rescue them when they were enslaved with no hope of rescue. Instead of being forever grateful, the Israelites falsely concluded that they were somehow superior to all other races. Instead of being a light to the nations around them, they acted like the nations around them and one of the ways in which they acted like all the other nations is they acted as if they were better than all of the other nations. By the time we get to the NT, the nation of Israel is deeply steeped into this sinful thinking that they are superior to all other peoples. That means that Peter believes this. John believes this. James believes this. Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, Thaddeus and the rest of the 12 all believe this. How on earth are these guys going to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth when they think that their race is intrinsically superior?

In Matthew 15, we are only months away from a monumental event in the plan of God for the peoples of this world. Back in Genesis 11, the people of the earth were together. They lived unified in their rebellion against God. God cursed their rebellion. God blew up their plan to dethrone him. He cursed them with languages, so that they could no longer communicate with one another. Their languages separated them from one another and from the tower of Babel, they scattered. They went from one people to many nations. Well, in a few months from Matthew 15, God is going to do an amazing thing. He is going to break that curse. He is going to break that curse through the death of his Son on the cross. After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the disciples and initial believers were all gathered together one day in a house. It was good and beautiful that they were all together in one place. It was good, but not good enough. God's plan is to have more than

Jews who follow him. God's plan is to have one people made up of all kinds of people; to have one nation made up of people from all the nations; and for us to sing a new song together though we come from all of the languages. So, what does God do on that day in Acts 2? He launches the church! The church is launched by the baptism of the Spirit. The Spirit took each believer and placed (immersed) each one into a spiritual membership with the others. As part of that, the Spirit gave them in that moment the ability to speak in different languages, not because they were cursed, but because the curse had been broken and they were now able to call all people from every tribe, language and nation to come through Christ into one kingdom and be part of one people. The birthday of the church was a preview of what the church was called to do and what the church would do and what we are doing, right now.

Now, you are ready for this text. We read these accounts, and we think, okay, he healed some more people, right? He has done that before and here he is doing it again. We know this. What else is there to say about it? Then Matthew throws in this account about Jesus feeding the 4,000. 4,000 is not as impressive as 5,000, so this account gets very little attention, besides after preaching on the story of feeding the 5,000 what really can I say now that I did not say then? And that is exactly what I was thinking when I approached this text this week. What else can I say about Jesus healing people that I haven't already said? And yet, I knew that these accounts were not here by accident. Matthew had a specific reason to include this. And, as we have noted in every single miracle account, there was a specific reason for the account, which always led to an "Aha" moment for us. So, I knew that this was not filler. There was something happening here and I needed to find out what it was.

There are three accounts. The first one has obvious racial and ethnic and gender implications. Jesus goes to Tyre and Sidon and has a conversation with a woman that is unlike any conversation that we have heard from him yet. Instead of responding by saying that Jesus certainly wasn't very nice, we need to assume that the unusual nature of this conversation is revealing that something very unusual is taking place. So, that is obviously one clue. The next clue was the use of the word "Canaanite." This is a racial term and it is not a flattering one. This is the only place in the NT where this term occurs. So, the combination of those factors got me wondering. But the light bulb went on when I looked at a map (map) of the region and realized, according to Mark's account of this, where exactly Jesus went after he was in Tyre and Sidon. He went into the Decapolis (10 cities) region, which was Gentile territory. Back in chapter 8, he healed the servant of a Gentile, but the servant was a Jew. Now, he has actually healed a Gentile in the first account and he proceeds to heal a whole bunch of Gentiles who do what? "They glorified the God of Israel." (v.31) Jews wouldn't say that, only Gentiles would. They glorify the God of Israel because Israel's God has come to them and has healed them. Then Christ feeds them. What is going on? Then it made sense to me. Jesus is doing the very same things for the Gentiles that he did for the Jews. And not only are the disciples witnessing this, but chapter 15 concludes with 12 Jewish men, feeding 4,000 predominantly Gentile men. And I just had to smile and say, "Jesus, that was really good. I mean, that was crazy good!" One more textual clue and then we will go through the 3 accounts: Look at how chapter 15 begins and look at how chapter 16 begins. Both are confrontations with the

Pharisees. In between is Jesus going to the Gentiles because, he came to his own and his own received him not, and he is preparing his disciples to go call people who were not his people to now be his people.

Let's look at these three accounts about the compassion of Christ remembering that they all take place in a Gentile context. I will give you an overview of each account and then point out the big idea and you will see how Jesus is intentionally challenging the world view of his disciples and is in fact turning the page of history and setting the stage for calling to himself one people from all peoples.

Overview of first vignette (15.21-28)

Jesus withdrew from there (v.21). This was an act of judgment on the Pharisees, a time of more personal ministry to his disciples, but do not miss the obvious. Christ left Israel and clearly went into Gentile territory. And bam (behold) a woman from that region came out crying. Matthew uses the loaded description of "Canaanite" in reference to her. This identified her as being from the region of Canaan where all of the people were pagan idol worshippers. Not far from her was the temple of the pagan god of Eshmun who was supposed to be a god of healing. No doubt she knew about that, but she is not there. Her daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. I believe that her daughter at this very minute is being tormented by this demon and this woman is frantic to get her daughter some relief. Keep in mind that it is very possible that this mother had actually offered her daughter to the demonic powers that are associated with idolatry and is living with the consequences of that. The only power she has known is the power of idols, but when the idols turn on you, which they do, what do you do? She has come with her need to Christ. And she calls him Lord. It is doubtful that she really knows that he is the Lord of creation and King of glory. She is probably using the term as a title of respect, but in calling him "Son of David", she has just made a profound statement about his identity. It is the same title that the blind men used for Jesus back in chapter 9 and of course it furthers this theme of what this king is like. Back in chapter 9, two needy Jewish men call Jesus "Son of David" and he heals them. Here in chapter 15 a needy Gentile woman calls Jesus "Son of David." What is going to happen to her? Is Jesus a king only for Jews? Is the Messiah a Messiah only for Jews? The Jews think that. The disciples think that. Here is a king who has already demonstrated that he cares for his flock, but here is a woman, a Canaanite woman, who dares to believe that he is a king who is going to care for someone who is outside of his flock! She throws herself completely at the mercy of Christ, and...he is silent (23).

We are stunned at this. But, the disciples aren't. In fact, they beg Jesus to send her away because she is embarrassing them and annoying them with her persistence. She is a Canaanite! But she is persistent. She is persistent in her cry for mercy and refuses to give up. Do you see what I see here? She is so convinced that Jesus is merciful and will be merciful to her that her conviction of that is stronger than the disciples. She believes in the mercy of Jesus toward her more than the disciples do. They want her to go away. But she refuses and Jesus, while initially silent, does not send her away because he apparently is looking for that kind of response. So he probes a little deeper when he says, "I was sent

only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This is consistent with the instructions that Jesus had given to the disciples before their short-term missions trip. But she is desperate and she comes and she kneels and she pleads, “Lord, help me.” Again Jesus pushes back and says that it is not right to waste the food that the children are supposed to get and give it to their pets (word for dog is a domestic word). She won’t give up and she is not offended. She openly admits her need and identifies herself as one who is completely at his mercy. In fact, when she says, “Yes, Lord (3rd time using the title “Lord”), yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” what happens? Jesus concedes her point. This is the only time in the gospels when Jesus appears to be beaten in a debate and it is a woman and a Gentile who does it. That is what Jesus is looking for! Which then makes it clear what the point of this account is about.

1. **This is what a candidate for being a follower of Christ looks like.** (21-28)

a. **One who is needy and owns it**

b. **One who is desperate for rescue**

People who do not acknowledge their true condition cannot be a disciple of Christ. You cannot follow the Savior, unless you realize that you need to be saved.

c. **One who truly believes that Christ alone can rescue**

You have two choices when you face your desperate neediness: a) Christ or b) despair

d. **One who is humble**

e. **One who is persistent.**

This is not a shallow belief, but a fundamental conviction that is evidenced in persistent faith. So why did Christ respond this way to this woman? 3 reasons:

- this was good for this woman

It forced her to consider the depth of her belief. The silence of Christ and then the two responses to her pleads were all opportunities for her to get up and walk away. But she did not. She really believed.

- this was good for the disciples

They needed to see that Gentiles were capable of genuine belief. In fact, this Gentile did what most of the Jews did not. They needed to see this for themselves because they were witnessing a turning point in the ministry of Christ. They were witnessing a turning point in the plan of God and they were going to be part of it. They needed to see raw, unflinching persistent faith in the life of a Gentile woman in such a way that they could not deny it or explain it away.

- this is good for us to see this.

This is a picture of conversion. Following Christ is not using him in order to get the life that we think we deserve. We trust Christ in order to be rescued from the life that we do deserve. If you think that following Jesus is a matter of Him doing everything for you that you want, instantly, then you do not understand discipleship. Following Jesus begins with a total surrender of myself to Christ, no matter the cost, no matter what others may think, no matter what cultural norms are broken... Jesus pressed this woman to see if what she was professing was really indeed what she believed – and it was! Jesus did the same kind of thing with the rich young ruler, and what was his response? He turned away. Christ is so good and so loving that when he does not answer in the moment, or even when he says “No”, it is only because he is going to say “Yes” to something that is even better.

Overview of the second vignette (15.29-31)

Jesus and his disciples come back to the region of the Sea of Galilee but they go to the Gentile area. And Jesus does with them what he did with the Jews. What happens here is basically a repeat of what happened in chapters 5-8. He went up on a mountain and sat down. When Rabbis would teach, they would sit down. In our culture, when someone speaks, they stand up. But the teachers then would sit down and the students or disciples would gather around to listen. Jesus did this when he gave the Sermon on the Mount, and he is doing it here. After he gave the Sermon on the Mount, he healed people. We find out from v.32 that Jesus was with these people for three days. So while Jesus taught and then healed people, Matthew does not focus on the teaching that Christ does, but on the healing. I think that he does this because like the Canaanite woman, they came with their needs and they came before him and were at his feet. They brought their lame and crippled, who obviously needed help getting to Jesus. They brought the blind and the mute and many others and they put them at the feet of Jesus. The healing ministry of Christ in their lives was obvious to all. The mute could speak, the blind could see, the lame could walk and the crippled were restored. The evidence was overwhelming. It was not only overwhelming to the people, whose response makes it clear that they have been drawn to worship the God of Israel, but the evidence is overwhelming to the disciples. The point is clear:

2. **This is how Jesus responds to ALL people who admit their need.** (29-31)

Being blind, mute, lame or crippled is an obvious and therefore undeniable need. It is hard to hide the fact that you cannot see or cannot walk. In order for these people to be healed, they had to admit that they had a need and then they had to come to Jesus, or be willing for someone to bring them to Jesus. People who do not have obvious needs can compare themselves to those who have obvious needs and wrongfully conclude that they are better.

Overview of the third vignette (15.32-39)

The popularity of Christ in this Gentile region is obvious. The people are so taken with the ministry of Jesus that they stay for three days. Three days without hotels, porta-potties, showers or food vendors. So, Jesus, like he did back in chapter 14 takes the initiative as he anticipates a matter of practical concern. These people need to eat. The disciples respond with practical concern as well. We are in the middle of a rather desolate place. Where are we going to get enough food to feed a crowd like this? Now, it is easy to assume that the disciples simply forgot what had happened when Jesus had fed the 5,000, but, I don't think that is the case. There are 12 disciples. Surely at least one of them would have remembered that they had been in a similar situation before, right? I know that the text does not say this explicitly, but I am absolutely convinced that they did not suggest that Jesus all of these people, like he did before because they did not want Jesus to feed the Gentiles like he fed the Jews. I believe that even though Jesus said that he was unwilling to send the crowd away, that this is exactly what the disciples wanted. They were in enemy territory. They wanted to get away from these people as soon as they could, but Jesus was pushing them now, like he pushed the Canaanite woman. How many loaves do you have? Here we go again. Jesus takes the food, gives thanks for the food, then multiplies the food as he gives it to his disciples who serve the people. And now, the point becomes clear.

3. **This is what we all will get to do with Jesus one day.** (32-39)

Revelation 19.6-9

At this point in the story of redemption, the Jews have experienced a preview of the marriage banquet and now the Gentiles have experienced a preview of the marriage banquet. But, there is not a separate marriage banquet for the Jews and for the Gentiles anymore than there is a separate banquet for whites, blacks, Asians, Latinos, etc. There is one Lord who is Lord over all and one bride, one people, one holy nation. And the church today is called to be a taste of that day that is to come.

Take Home Truths

What can you do today and this year that will advance this aspect of the mission of the church? Let me tease this out a bit. Do Jerry and Kellie Bengé love us? Yes. But, if they love us, then why did they leave us and go to Ukraine? They left us because they not only love us; they love others. Ok. Let's say that every Sunday after church you eat with the same group of people from church and that over the years, you have become very close friends and you love each other. You are now very comfortable with these people because you are close with them. But, there are other people, new people, or others who are not as familiar to you, but you never consider eating with them, simply because you already have your routine. But your routine needs to have a bigger heart and bigger eyes. Not because you do not love your friends, but because you do not just love your friends. So, today at lunch, challenge one another to find other people to eat with next week. Strategize about it. Discuss whom you can invite. Pray for one another and plan to get together the following week to talk about how that went. If you eat at home, consider

adding a little more soup to the crock pot so that you can include a couple of more people. Because what happens, is that we get comfortable with the benefits of grace to the point where we do not want to share them.

I like my small group. Great! I like mine. But, am I unwilling to experience change so that others could be included in a small group? Am I unwilling for my group to be multiplied into two groups to make room for others in our church family who also need fellowship on that level? Or, am only willing to love those I am comfortable with?

What would happen if just 50% of us chose to sit in a different place on Sunday morning because you intentionally went out of your way to engage with people whom you are not familiar with? What if you left a seat open at your Bible class table for someone new and prayed for them before they came? The message is clear. Jesus loves you, but he loves others, not just you and he loves others who are not exactly like you. You are to love others, but not just the ones that you already know, but the ones that you don't. We are on a mission to reflect Jesus to this world. It starts with reflecting Jesus to one another.

You are the concluding illustration of this message.