

PENTECOST 11

YEAR A

ISAIAH 56:1, 6-8

ROMANS 11:1-2a, 29-32

MATTHEW 15:10-28

AUGUST 19, 20, 2017

Reading through the Old Testament might cause us to think of a God that claims one people as God's own. It is true that God called Abraham from among the people of the earth and established a special relationship with the descendants of Abraham. In our reading from Romans 11 Paul talks about the special relationship God has with God's people and how that has not changed. Many of the stories in the Old Testament contain requests that the Israelites destroy all the people they defeat in war. If we read these verses and Bible stories we get the idea that God is a God of destruction and that God excludes those that are not Hebrew, Israelite or Jew. It appears that God is exclusionary instead of including all people. We also read about a people that are closed to any outside participation in the Temple and other rituals of Judaism. Only Israelites were permitted and welcome in the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

Today we read from Isaiah 56. We read about a God that accepts all people. God receives foreigners and outcasts. God receives anyone that desires to come into the house of prayer. In the gospel stories of Jesus cleansing the Temple, we read about Jesus being angry with the moneychangers and the dealers of livestock because they have made the Temple a marketplace instead of a house of prayer and a house of worship. They have made God's house a place where some are not welcome. The reason for the house of worship is that God is worshipped and that people have a place to gather for prayers. It was a place to offer sacrifices. It was to be for all people.

Isaiah 56:1 Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.

I believe God has always desired to include all people in the kingdom. God created all of us and desires that we all are in a loving relationship with God and

with each other. I also believe the Israelites and later the Jews missed the point of God's word. They missed the point of what it meant to be called the Chosen People. The house of God is a house of worship, prayer and praising God. It is a place where people are welcomed. As we read from Isaiah 56 we see that God welcomes any that would come to God. God receives those that come into the house of the Lord. The house of prayer is a house for all people. It is a place where people come together around the word of God and around prayer.

God does not love some and hate others. God loves all that God created. In recent days we heard news of white supremacy groups in Virginia and other issues of violence and hatred toward one group or another. There has been much suffering and injustice in Charlottesville and other places around our country and in the world. God did not create us to hate or exclude others based on skin color or where some were born. God does not ordain or bless oppression of any kind but wants us to love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves.

Isaiah 56:6 And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant

Israel has always been regarded as a light to the nations. In the Old Testament "nations" means gentiles. The Israelites were to be lights to the nations meaning they were to shine the light so that other people would come to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were to be an inclusive people that desired all people to come under the umbrella of God's love. I also believe the church is to be a light to the nations. Even when Paul says that the Jews have a special place with God they are to be an inclusive people and we are to be an inclusive people. We do not keep people out based on lifestyle or ethnic background. We do not exclude those we see as "different" whatever that difference might look like. No one should have to live in fear of another person or group of people. God's people are to seek justice and to lift those that are being oppressed.

I wonder if our Lord looks at us with great anger. Jesus said in his departing words in John's gospel that we were to remain one as he and the Father are one. Jesus desired that we would welcome and encourage others even when they are a bit different from us.

Isaiah 56:7, 8 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. ⁸Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Many feel unwelcome in churches yet God welcomes anyone that would come into the church. God even sends us out to those that are different from us because God wants to welcome them into the body of Christ. Isaiah says that the house of God is a house of prayer. He says it is a house of prayer for all people. All people means we receive the Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Finns and Germans. We receive the Roman Catholics, the Presbyterians, the United Methodists, Baptists and any other. We receive people from North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and from Liberia. When Isaiah says that all are invited into the house of prayer he would include divorced people and widowed people. God receives people new to the church and people that have been here for a while. When Isaiah says that this is the house of prayer for all people he includes those that are searching no matter where they come from. He includes little people and big people. I wonder if our Lord accepts gay people.

The Israelites were often preoccupied with protecting themselves from outsiders. Some of this was necessary as it is for any country protecting itself from those that would seek to destroy them. It is OK for any country, including our own, to be smart about immigration. Our leaders have a duty to protect the citizens to the best of their ability. This must never be so that those that are "different" are kept out. The Israelites sought to keep outsiders on the outside. Their religion and their relationship with God was always important to them. Even when they forgot to worship God they still regarded themselves as the Chosen People. Yet

God wants all people to come into a strong and loving relationship with God's and receive salvation. Jesus Christ certainly was a Jew and died for the salvation of the Jews. Jesus also died on the cross that all people might be drawn to him. You and I come to eternal life through our Lord's death and resurrection. We share this life with all others. Christ died for all people. He died and rose again that you and I would have life.

We see this many times in the gospels including our verses from Matthew 15. The Canaanite woman went to Jesus because her daughter was demon possessed. After some conversation Jesus ministered to this woman that was not a Jew. The disciples would have sent her away but Jesus engaged her in conversation and then offered healing. Jesus does the same for you and me. Jesus offers us life no matter who we are or where we have been. He does not look at what we have done. When the Lord forgives our sin he also erases it.

We are the body of Christ. We worship God in this house of prayer. We praise the name of our Lord in this place and we offer thanks and praise to God for all that come here. We do not look at hair color or skin color. As the body of Christ we reach out in love for God's people and we welcome all that are here. There are many more that will come into this house of worship. Our task is to minister to them all. Our task is to share the gospel of love with all that are here. AMEN