

August 16, 2026
Proper 15A
Trinity, St. Louis
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Genesis 45:1-15

Psalms 133

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15: 10-28

In the Name of the Triune God who challenges our assumptions. Amen.

I want to begin by offering the beginning lines of a hymn verse, penned in the 19th century by George Rawson, an English Congregationalist layman:

We limit not the truth of God
to our poor reach of mind,
to notions of our day and place,
crude, partial, and confined...¹

Today's lessons are all about our poor reach of mind and the wideness of God's mercy. In Genesis, we come to the high point of Joseph's story. Joseph lived what a friend of mine would call "a very interesting life." Hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, imprisoned, released, raised to the heights of power, slandered, imprisoned again and, when his predictions came to pass, was released again and returned to power.

But Joseph's rags to riches story gets even more complicated when the brothers who had sold him into slavery now stand before him, asking for food; and they do not recognize him.

Finally, Joseph reveals his identity, saying, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt." He hurries on to tell them not to be distressed, because "God sent me before you to preserve life." Many might have plotted revenge, but God's mercy is wide enough to redeem even his brothers' acts that had been motivated by jealousy and hatred.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul warns the Gentile church not to get too big for its britches and imagine that God has rejected the Jews. "By no means!"

¹ H-629. Text by George Rawson (1807-1889).

Instead, Paul explains, both Jew and Gentile have been disobedient, enabling God to be “merciful to all.” *We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind.*

When we turn to the gospel, Matthew tells us two more stories about partial thinking. We first find Jesus in the middle of yet another debate with some Pharisees over dietary laws.

Jesus broadens our understanding, reminding us that it really doesn’t matter if we wash our hands (or live in nice neighborhoods, or go to good schools), if our hearts and minds and mouths are filled with evil intentions and all that follows.

In the second story, Jesus has gone into the district of Tyre and Sidon, non-Jewish towns in what is now Lebanon. A desperate mother, a Canaanite, shouts at Jesus to have mercy, to help her ailing daughter. *And he did not answer her at all.* At all. In typical fashion, the disciples are quick to act. *Send her away. She keeps yelling at us.* And the conversation seems to spiral out of control. Oof!

I find this to be one of the most painful passages in Scripture; and one of the most timely. Because this is a story of who’s in and who’s out; who gets to sit at the welcome table and who has to stand out in the dark. It’s a story of who gets to eat at all.

At first glance, Jesus seems to be saying that God is stingy, hoarding the promises of abundant life to a small circle of folks. *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.* And if we’re honest, we probably understand that...so long as we are within that small circle.

After all, the world’s logic tells us, there’s only so much good to go around. You may remember that, in January 2025, J.D. Vance invoked an “old school ... Christian concept” he later identified as the “ordo amoris,” which he said teaches that one’s “compassion belongs first” to one’s family and fellow citizens, “and then after that” to the rest of the world. Such are the *notions of our day and place, crude, partial, and confined.*

Shortly after, the late Pope Francis wrote to the U.S. Bishops on the topic of immigration saying, in part, “Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups.”² *We limit not the truth of God.*

² <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>

Even after being rebuffed with a shocking but familiar ethnic slur that Jews and Canaanites tossed back and forth, this brave and faithful woman doesn't scuttle off in silence. Kneeling before Jesus, in a posture of submission and worship, she insists on being seen and heard. Not as a woman, or a Canaanite, or an indigenous person (Jesus is on her turf, after all), or a burden, and certainly not as a little dog, but as a child of God.

She pushes back at Jesus. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Jesus hears her, and heals her daughter immediately, praising the woman's great faith. She is determined. She is persistent. She is faithful. And her daughter is healed. *For the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind.*

I want to share a poem by Jan Richardson that captures the urgency of the Canaanite woman's persistent claim to the wideness of God's mercy. It is called *Stubborn Blessing*.

Stubborn Blessing – Jan Richardson³

Don't tell me no.
I have seen you
feed the thousands,
seen miracles spill
from your hands
like water, like wine,
seen you with circles
and circles of crowds
pressed around you
and not one soul
turned away.

Don't start with me.

I am saying
you can close the door
but I will keep knocking.
You can go silent
but I will keep shouting.
You can tighten the circle

³ © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com.

but I will trace a bigger one
around you,
around the life of my child
who will tell you
no one surpasses a mother
for stubbornness.

I am saying
I know what you
can do with crumbs
and I am claiming mine,
every morsel and scrap
you have up your sleeve.
Unclench your hand,
your heart.
Let the scraps fall
like manna,
like mercy
for the life
of my child,
the life of
the world.

Don't you tell me no.

This unnamed Canaanite woman – an outsider to Matthew's hearers – can be a model for all of us. Her words still echo in the Prayer of Humble Access "Lord, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, **but** thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have **mercy**..." (BCP p. 337).

Mercy is Joseph greeting his brothers with tears and kisses; mercy is God's promise to Jew and Gentile alike; mercy is Jesus healing the woman's daughter.

Mercy defies all the boundaries and barriers we like to draw: race, class, nationality, language, upbringing, schooling, religion (the list is endless, isn't it?). These lines define, for us, who is in & who is out, who is acceptable and who is rejected, who belongs and who doesn't. Lines assign worth. Lines unite and divide. Even the woman's "name" – Canaanite – implies lines of racial and

national and religious distinction. The world marks her as one outside the lines. But God's mercy does not.

This is still a radical concept — that all are beloved of God. That all have equal worth. Even “them.” Take just one example. The root of our national sin of racism would be cut off; it would wither and die if we, as a people, came to believe this truth. If we really lived as the Psalmist dreams, *How good and pleasant a thing it is: when God's people live together in unity.*⁴ But the world in which we live seems stubbornly opposed to this vision.

On Friday, the Episcopal Church remembered and gave thanks for Jonathan Myrick Daniels, seminarian and martyr. He was born in Keene, New Hampshire, in 1939, eventually becoming an Episcopal seminarian in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In March 1965, the televised appeal of Martin Luther King, Jr. to come to Selma to secure for all citizens the right to vote drew Jonathan to a time and place where the nation's racism and the Episcopal Church's share in that inheritance were exposed. He took leave from seminary to remain in Selma, where he was sponsored by the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity.

After joining a picket line in Hayneville, Alabama on August 14, Jonathan and three companions were arrested and jailed, then unexpectedly released. Aware that they were in danger, they walked to a small store. As sixteen-year-old African-American Ruby Sales reached the top step of the entrance, a 52-year-old part-time deputy sheriff named Tom Coleman stepped into the doorway holding a pump shotgun, spouting racial and gender slurs – nothing as polite as “dog.” Jonathan pulled Ruby to one side to shield her from the unexpected threat, and was shot in the stomach by a shotgun blast. He died immediately.

A month later, an all-white jury found Coleman not guilty of manslaughter. The county solicitor, who prosecuted the case, said afterward that Daniels would still be alive if he'd chosen to mind his own business.⁵

The letters and papers Jonathan left bear eloquent witness to the profound effect his time in Alabama had upon him. He writes, “The faith with which I went to Selma has not changed: it has grown ... I began to know in my bones and

⁴ Psalm 133:1, *A New Zealand Prayerbook*, p. 357.

⁵ For a more detailed version of the story, including the other two companions, see <https://jwdauthor.substack.com/p/the-legacy-of-jonathan-daniels>

sinews that ...we are indelibly and unspeakably one." Ruby Sales, now 78, became (and remains) a legendary civil rights activist.

Matthew's gospel makes clear that when we draw lines around us, between who's in and who's out, we will invariably find God made manifest in Jesus, and Jonathan, and Ruby, on the other side. *We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind.*

So, dear friends in Christ, today I bring some questions. How do we stop limiting the truth of God to our poor reach of mind? What is stopping us from living the way God has made us to live? What is stopping us from loving the way God invites us to love--the way that God first loved us? What is stopping us from daring to follow the example of Jonathan Daniels, Ruby Sales, or the Canaanite woman, pleading, *Kyrie eleison*? Lord, have mercy! Shouting, if we must, for mercy for all.

Let the scraps fall
like manna,
like mercy
for the life

...

of the world.

Don't you tell me no.

There is a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea. Amen.