

Sermon 2017-08-20 - Year A - Pentecost 8-17

Isaiah 56:1–8; Psalm 67; Romans 11:13–24; Matthew 15:21–28

“Unite the Right” White Nationalist Rally - Charlottesville, VA

- Matthew Heimbach, leader of the Charlottesville rally, sums up the movement’s “primary motivating factor” saying, “We must secure the existence of our people and the future for white children”
- On this movement, USA Today reports:
 - “Heimbach, like many of those rallying alongside him Saturday, sees white identity, culture and religion as increasingly endangered by a diversifying America. He sees America as a failure and says his ultimate goal is to see it carved into ethno-states, with parts set aside for whites, parts for blacks, parts for Hispanics and so on.”
 - “He and others in his fold are quick to blame their woes on “the Jewish power structure.” They’re apt to speak fondly of Adolph Hitler, deny the Holocaust and appreciate the leadership of strong nationalists worldwide, from Russia’s Putin to Syria’s Assad.”¹

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman - Matthew 15

- Is Jesus being racist? It certainly sounds like it at first glance, but this would be out of character for Jesus who welcomes Gentiles at other times. What is going on?
- The pause where he doesn’t answer the woman could have simply been Jesus deciding what to do in this situation.
- The Gentiles had commonly been called “dogs” by the Israelites for Generations, referring to the fact that they were unclean according to the law.
 - Jesus uses a different word for “dog” (kynarion) than the one that he normally used (kyon). This word “is probably chosen by Jesus in...Mt. 25:26 to show that there is a distinction between Jews and Gentiles but still to give the Gentiles a place in the house. The woman in her reply accepts the distinction but in so doing takes the place that is offered and finds the help she seeks.”²
- Why does Jesus make this distinction at all?
 - Because he was “*sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” (Matthew 15:24, ESV)
 - The message of the Gospel had to be preached first to the Israelites, God’s chosen people. This passage is hinting at what is to come, that God will eventually include the Gentiles as well.
 - Blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1–3, ESV). Jesus comes to fulfill the law and the prophets, including this Abrahamic promise.

¹ Heimbach quote and commentary taken from:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/08/12/meet-man-middle-unite-right-rally-charlottesville/562571001/>

² Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 494.

The Great Olive Tree - Romans 11

- In Romans 11 the tables have turned. Here Paul is speaking to a mostly Gentile audience and he is trying to describe the relationship between Gentile believers and the People of Israel. Have the Gentiles replaced the Jews as the people of God? No.
- Paul uses the image of an olive tree to explain this relationship.
 - Olive trees are very common all over the Mediterranean region.
 - There was a practice in ancient Rome and Palestine in which they would take an old olive tree that had ceased to be productive and rejuvenate it by grafting on branches from a wild olive tree.
 - Here the Israelites are represented as this ancient olive tree which has been pruned and onto which are now being grafted wild gentile branches which are not naturally a part of this tree.
- What is the determining factor as to whether a branch is cut off or grafted in? Faith.
 - Membership in the people of God is now by faith rather than by birth. The branches that were broken off were separated because of their unbelief (Rom 11:20-21). But they can be grafted back in if they believe (v. 23).
 - *“And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”* (Matthew 3:9–10, ESV)
 - God doesn’t have grandchildren.
- God has not abandoned his chosen people, rather, he is hoping that the inclusion of others will make them jealous and stimulate their faith in him.

Race and the Bible

- The difference between Jew and Gentile is the only major racial distinction we see in the Bible and both Jesus and Paul are showing that even this distinction is ceasing to be important. Jesus shows it peaking over the horizon. Paul says that it has arrived but imperfectly. There were still divisions in the Church in Paul’s time.
 - “Neither Jew nor Greek...” (Gal 3:25-29)
- We see the fullness of this vision in Revelation. “Every Tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev 7:9-12).
 - It is my prayer that the makeup of this congregation will increasingly reflect the eternal makeup of God’s kingdom. That this will be a place where people of different ethnicities will be united by faith, not divided by human distinctions.
- The major distinction now is not between black, white, latino, and asian. It is not even between Jew and Gentile. The major distinction now is between belief and unbelief.
 - This is not so that we can look down on those who don’t have faith. Paul warns us that if the natural branches have been cut off, we can just as easily be cut off (Rom 11:21).
 - The distinction is made so that we can welcome others and help them to be grafted into the people of God. Welcoming Neighbors | Discipling Believers.