

Rev. Randall Hubbard
Isaiah 56:1, 6-7
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
August 13-14, 2011

One of my dearest and most cherished friends is an African-American priest that serves in the Diocese of Birmingham, Alabama. His name is Fr. Vernon Huguley. Fr. Huguley, I was visiting him. Every year we try to get together at least once or twice a year just to see each other, to maintain the friendship and the like. Back years ago before I was a pastor when I had a lot more freedom as an associate pastor, I would travel and see him more frequently. But nonetheless, I was visiting him one time and we were at one of his churches. He pastored two African-American parishes. One was affluent, and one was very poor. At both churches I noticed that as the parishioners arrived, he would greet them saying, "Child of God, welcome. Child of God, how was your week. Child of God, how's your Momma doing? Child of God." Everybody was addressed as child of God. And then when mass was over, he again would send them on their way, "Child of God, have a good week. Child of God, I hope your appointment goes well with the doctor." All of these different things, but it was always "child of God."

So I said to him, "Vernon, I really like how you address the people calling them child of God." He said, "I do it for two reasons. One is, we all need to hear that we are children of God. That each one of us is a child of God. The second reason I do it is, I need to remind myself, too, that they're children of God 'cause sometimes they get on my last nerve."

I tell the story because it's important that we do recognize that we are children of God. That each of us here is a child of God, precious in our God's own eyes. And so we're reminded then in our scriptures this weekend of that reality that all of us are loved, all of us are cherished by our God, all of us created in the image of our God.

In our gospel account, hopefully we were a little startled by this gospel reading, because we hear Jesus do and say some things that we never in a million years would ever expect Jesus to say or do. Here he's traveling in Gentile territory, and this woman approaches him asking, begging, pleading for his help. Her daughter is tormented by a demon. And so Jesus, it says, initially just ignored her. Didn't

pay her any attention. And then when Jesus' disciples come to him and say, "Lord you have to do something about this woman; she's wearing us out. She just keeps coming and keeps coming. Please dismiss her. Get rid of this woman!"

And so Jesus turns to her and he says, "I have come for the lost sheep of Israel. That's the only group I am to serve!" And she begs with him even more, "Lord please help me."

And he says, "Listen, this is how it is. It's not right to take the food of the children and to toss it to the dogs." Hopefully you heard it right. He basically called her a dog. And she comes back, "But Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the master's table." And Jesus says to her, "Woman, you have great faith. Let it be done as you wish." And her daughter was healed.

Now, when we hear this story, what is important for us to recognize is that Jesus' initial reaction and response to this woman would have been an acceptable posture in his day and time. First and foremost, it was unheard of for a woman to approach a man to make a request. And then on top of that, she was gentile. A group despised by the Jews. And yet she persisted. She not only persists, she even acknowledges Jesus as the messiah, son of David, as the Christ, as one anointed by God. And Jesus, again, is rather dismissive. And even at the urging of his disciples, he tries to set it straight, again maintaining the posture that would have been socially acceptable in his day and time. And she's not going to have any part of it. She comes back again, and Jesus then submits. But what Jesus shows his disciples is this is how we are with people. This is what is acceptable to us as a people. And then he shows his disciples, but this is how it is with God, that all are to be seen as God's children. It doesn't matter, woman, gentile or other. All are to be seen as children of God.

And what our readings this weekend call to mind for us is that we really have to ask ourselves some hard questions about our own prejudices and biases. And this is the truth. This is the truth. Every one of us, every one of us has prejudices and biases. And to say we don't is a lie. Every one of us. On all kinds of things. It can be on race, ethnicity; it can be about sexism; it can be gay or straight; it can be political – Democrat or Republican. But we all harbor prejudices and biases.

But what is important for us to recognize is that regardless of our differences that we are to be a people who recognize in each other a child of God. That regardless of the differences that we might have with one another that we can be respectful of each other in spite of our differences. And we can do that because we are children

of God! All of us loved by our God! All of us forgiven by our God! All of us blessed by our God!

And so as we come here this weekend, as we come here to give praise to our God, we are reminded as a people of faith that each of us is a child of God. And that every person we meet is a child of God. And hopefully God's spirit will give us that strength and that courage to always be aware and acknowledge in each person the value and the importance we all hold in our God's eyes. Each of us, each of us a child of God.

Turn to the person next to you and say, "Hello child of God." "Hello child of God." "Hello child of God." "Hello child of God." "Hello child of God."

Children of God, let us now stand and profess the faith that unites us as God's children.