

Sunday August 16, 2020 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

**Bible Study – Matthew 15:10-28; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
“To The Lost Sheep”**

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have each participant answer the question, “Whom do you find is the hardest to extend mercy to?”

Matthew 15:10-28. Context. This week’s reading falls into two parts: the first is Jesus' critique of the religious leadership of his day, and the second is Jesus' (initial) rebuff of the Canaanite (read Gentile) woman's request, followed by her persistent faith and Jesus' granting her prayer. It's as though Jesus paused to reflect on his own critique of the religious leadership as he listened to the woman's plea: "Hmmm... I'm not becoming one of them, am I?" The passage as a whole almost reads like an allegory of Paul's point about both Jew and Gentile having fallen short of the glory of God, but those believing that Jesus is Lord will receive God's blessings.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32. Context. Romans 11 is the conclusion of Paul's reflection on the question set out at the beginning of chapter 9: what are we to make of the fact that most of ethnic Israel has rejected Jesus as Messiah? In this final section, Paul makes it clear once again that however faithless individual Israelites might be, God has not and will not give up on Israel as a whole. They have not been "superseded" by a Gentile church. Elijah found himself alone faithful to God when everyone else had "bowed the knee to Baal," but even then God did not reject the nation. God's "gifts and calling ... are irrevocable," no matter how they might be received. The final verses reiterate a theme announced at the beginning of the letter: all, both Jew and Gentile, have fallen short of the glory of God. But God has extended mercy to all, as well.

Read Matthew 15:10-28; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Matthew 15:10-28; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 again

Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Who are the people or groups of people named in the Matthew 15 passage? Which of these groups or people, from an ancient Israelite perspective, would have had the most religious clout or credibility? Who would have had the least?

- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus repeatedly articulated that his mission centered on the Israelites (Matthew 10:5, 15:24). However, there are examples like this story that indicate a widening of the mission (see also Matthew 8:5-13). These foreshadow the Great Commission, which will declare the all-encompassing scope of the mission (Matthew 28:16-20). Read the passage again, having participants place themselves in the story as the disciples. How surprising would Jesus' words about the Pharisees (v. 14) have been? How shocking would Jesus' words about the Canaanite woman have been in verse 28?
- What might this reveal about Jesus?
- How might Jesus' question in verse 24 be ironic? [Perhaps it is Israel that is, in fact, lost.]
- In the Romans passage, Paul is disputing Gentile Roman Christians who are tempted to act superior to Jewish Christians (and Jews in general). Paul will have none of it. As verses 30-31 make clear, just as Gentile Christians are allowed into the covenant family through God's mercy, that same mercy extends to all Jews. It is part of God's nature to extend mercy. What do these passages (both from Matthew and Romans) teach us about the extent of God's mercy and grace?
- How is it both reassuring and challenging that God's mercy and grace are all-encompassing?

Read Matthew 15:10-28; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 again

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Each person prays sharing their answer the following statements:

I ask God for....

I thank God for.....

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

Merciful God, your grace and mercy are so abundant that it is often hard to imagine or comprehend. Thankfully, we do not have to understand it but are called to live in light of your grace and mercy. Likewise, even when it goes against our inclinations and tendencies, empower us to extend the compassionate hand of mercy to those we meet. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.