

Sermon :: 16-Aug-2026
Proper 15, Year A

“ Jesus answered [the woman], ‘ ... Let it be done for you as you wish.’ ”

One day last month, when Jim and I were in England on our choir pilgrimage, I got to spend a fair amount of time in the quire (that’s Q-U-I-R-E, by the way!) of St George’s Chapel in Windsor Castle, as we rehearsed. The chapel is the spiritual home of the knights of the Order of the Garter, the oldest order of chivalry in England; and above us, all manner of heraldic crests and banners ... we might call them ‘coats of arms’ ... were affixed to and hanging from the towering tops of the quire stalls. Whenever I wasn’t singing, my eyes kept traveling upwards, to take in all the *meaning* ... all the *honor* ... all the *prestige* ... embedded in these symbols. The Knights of the Garter are, by law, the most senior knights of the realm. They enjoy a place of privilege within an even *wider* and more comprehensive system of ‘social precedence’ that ... *above* all the knights of all the various orders ... ‘ranks’—prioritizes, places, *evaluates*—members of the royal family ... officers of state ... peers of the realm (the ‘nobles’) ... and the bishops and other leaders in the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.¹

Now, in full candor, I *am* something of an Anglophile, and I appreciate all the history and tradition that are so eloquently summed up and represented in those dignified, decorous devices hanging in St George’s: the continuity ... the breadth ... even the heroism, great and small ... of the ‘English-slash-British experience’ over the centuries.^{2,3}

And yet, sitting in that venerable quire, I couldn’t help but *also* reflect upon how un-American all of this was: this notion of social *precedence* ... of an imposed (and imposing) ranking of social *worthiness* ... of, in a word, *ENTITLEMENT*. We’re a nation that has both expressly rejected the concept of nobility in its Constitution⁴ ... and has long privileged the democratic—small d—ideal that no one person’s vote or voice, opinion or honor, is greater than anyone else’s. Each of us—in *principle*, at least—has an equal say in how our nation is governed⁵ ... equal esteem in everyone else’s eyes—again, at least in *principle*. As a nation, we’ve rejected the idea that anyone is *ENTITLED* to greater deference ... or better treatment ... than anyone *else*.

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God’s radical rejection of *ENTITLEMENT* ... the divine *NO* to any one *person’s*, or *nation’s* or even *religious tradition’s* being, *PER SE*, better or worthier or more favored by God than any other ... runs throughout our readings today. ¶ Although Joseph’s older brothers—he’s a pipsqueak *eleventh* of *twelve*—have scorned him, sold him into slavery and seen him hauled off to Egypt ... by *God’s* ordinance, it is lowly *Joseph* who saves his family—and thus, all Israel—from famine by bringing

¹ Which, by the way, is Presbyterian.

² Only the devices of the incumbent knights hang in the Chapel. When a knight of the Garter dies, their regalia is retired. Still, this is a *tradition* that dates back almost seven hundred years.

³ Like many, I think, I am one of those Americans who appreciates the deep history and crusty mechanics of British society—and especially all its glamorous trappings—but also is glad to observe it from afar rather than live within it.

⁴ Article I, Section 9, clause 8.

⁵ I do not, but really should, go down the historical pathway of myriad efforts in our history to disenfranchise those whom our own American ‘ENTITLED’ didn’t deem worthy of the vote: women, enslaved people, immigrants, post-Reconstruction Black people, etc.

them to Egypt, to live on Pharaoh's generosity. There is no ENTITLEMENT of *birth order*. ¶ Saint Paul teaches that neither Jew nor Christian is better in the eyes of God: Christ has come to show mercy to Jew and Gentile *alike* ... to save *all* ... for, in the end, we are *all* disobedient to God. There is no ENTITLEMENT of *religion*.⁶ ¶ And in Jesus' enigmatic (and, admittedly, somewhat fractious⁷) interaction with the Canaanite⁸ woman, He rejects the superiority of any particular ethnicity or culture: While, *in the main*, He's come to save *Israel*⁹ ... He's now gone out of His way—*literally*: traveling to a distant region populated by people whom His own Jewish kin regard as unclean and untouchable—to indicate that His love embraces the *Canaanites*, too. There is no ENTITLEMENT of *birth* or *breeding*. The message is clear: There is no exclusivity or 'special-ness'—no ENTITLEMENT—in the eyes of God: God's countenance is wide; God's love is abundant; and God's salvation is a gift freely offered to *all*.

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The Episcopal Church today loudly echoes God's embrace-of-all: For not only *proclaiming* the equal dignity and God-given worth of every human being ... but also actively *standing up* for them ... are hallmarks of our theology¹⁰: marks that, in these conflicted, divisive times, I think we should make more widely known. For we, too, have *cast aside*¹¹ notions of human ENTITLEMENT: ideas that there are those whom God *favors* and those whom God *disfavors* ... those whom God *accepts* and those whom God *rejects* ... those whom Jesus *forgives* and those whom Jesus *cannot* forgive ... those whom Jesus *saves* and those whom Jesus *lets die* ... those who—through some dint of birth or behavior, merit or money—'*deserve*' Jesus' unconditional love and those who *don't*. Finally taking to heart *both* what Jesus *says* and what He *does*, in Scripture ... we (along with our like-minded sibling Christian traditions) have come to embrace God's utter rejection of any human ENTITLEMENT ... in the *universality* of Christ.

- Christian nationalists proclaim, in the Name of Christ, that *certain* individuals—certain *privileged* individuals ... *deserve* authority and control: an *outsized* influence over *policy* or an *exclusive* lock on *power*. But we *reject* this unGodly ENTITLEMENT ... and insist that the robust, unfettered and responsible *competition of ideas* and the fair, just and ethical *conduct of elections* yield the best outcomes for human society that we're capable of achieving, in this age.

⁶ To reiterate what I say so often: As Christians, we preach, teach and share the faith in Jesus Christ that we know to be true; this is the only authentic experience of God *we* have to share. But that it's *our* only experience doesn't necessarily also make it *the* only pathway to relationship with the Divine.

⁷ My own take, if I were going to preach on this reading directly: Jesus, having traveled well out of the Jewish territories, makes His interaction with the Canaanite woman a lesson in how we should listen, pause, reflect and reassess those whom we have written off—or out of our lives. He doesn't really despise or disrespect the woman, but He's showing how we can, and should, change our hearts about people(s).

⁸ In other gospels, Syro-Phoenician.

⁹ There is a wider message here that we don't have time to discuss today: Especially in Matthew, Jesus beholds Israel as a flock of lost sheep—straying and in danger; and as the Good Shepherd, He has come to save and rescue them. But this is so the 'flock' of Israel, once again secure, can *share* the faith and, in effect, become the source of the world's salvation. Indeed, this image of the world's eventually 'flocking' to Israel for salvation is found in some of the Old Testament prophets, like (later) Isaiah.

¹⁰ *I.e.*, both dogmatic and practical.

¹¹ If belatedly: To be sure, we have not always—or for all that long, even now—been so open-minded (or -handed) in our beliefs.

- Christian nationalists proclaim, as Jesus' self-appointed spokespersons, that there are certain groups whose wealth or pedigree ... color, nationality or ethnicity ... sex or sexuality ... makes them more deserving of *liberty* and *justice*... more deserving of *deference* and *respect* ... more deserving of the *riches* of this *land* and the *advantages* of its *economy*. But we *reject* this unGodly ENTITLEMENT ... and insist there is *one* set of human values ... *one* standard of just dealing ... *one* embrace of God's creatures ... grounded in Jesus' unstinting, self-sacrificing love ... that applies equally, and without exception, to *all*.
- Christian nationalists proclaim, as if Jesus *told* them so, that only *one* leader ... only *one* political ideology ... only *one* expression of Christianity—and a cramped, narrow one, at that! ... is 'acceptable' to God; and that any who don't 'toe the line' are apostate: traveling the road to perdition, by defying the 'will of God.' But we *reject* this unGodly ENTITLEMENT as a *perversion* of the lesson of Jesus' *entire life* ... and insist that He did not *exclude* anyone ... did not *reject* anyone ... did not *refuse* to *welcome* or *converse* with or *heal* or *feed* or *pray* with anyone¹² ... nor did He *elevate* or *enthron*e anyone,¹³ over and above their human sisters and brothers.
- Christian nationalists, conflating the false 'prosperity gospel' with the *true* Gospel of Christ, proclaim that you can tell how much God favors you—how 'special' you are in God's eyes—by looking at the bounty of your bank account ... the increase in your investment portfolio ... the loveliness of your home ... the lavishness of your lifestyle ... even the number of airplanes you own (!).
My friends, this is a complete 'upside-downing' of God's preferential option for the poor and the downtrodden—with whom, by the way, Jesus spent almost *all* His time in ministry ... and we *reject* it. We *insist* that God does not withhold either the necessities or the comforts of life based on sin or unworthiness; that Jesus does not bestow 'seals of good housekeeping' or 'medals of virtue' through the distribution of wealth. *Rather*, over and over again, He calls upon those who *have* good things ... who *have* means ... who *have* faith ... to *share* them, *in His Name*, with those who *don't*.
Yes, we can disagree on and debate the best *ways* to share, both individually and as a society: Those are matters of *policy*. But the *principle*—the '*Jesus principle*'—doesn't allow us to close our eyes to human *suffering* ... close our purses to human *need* ... or close our minds to human *oppression*. For doing so is ENTITLEMENT—*false* ENTITLEMENT ... and it *breaks* Jesus' *heart*.

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There is, I suppose, something in human nature that *wants* to ENTITLE: to sift and sort people ... categorize them ... rank them; make a list of who's up and who's down, who's in and who's out;

¹² Jesus does grow weary of those who question and oppose Him, and He is always careful to allow people to *choose* to follow Him—to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit, in them—rather than forcing faith upon anyone. But this is not rejection: He merely leaves the decision up to us, to make freely.

¹³ He appoints Peter as the head of the Church, so that the faith Jesus has birthed will continue. Jesus, in effect, makes Peter His 'agent,' but He doesn't ennoble Peter. Indeed, Jesus tells Peter that his life will be difficult and his end grievous (John 21:18-19).

whom we should *defer* to ... whom we *equal* ... and, inevitably, whom we're *better* than. But Jesus doesn't *do* this ... Jesus doesn't *teach* this ... and Jesus doesn't approve of this in *us*, either.

We're blessed to live in a land that, historically, has valued equality and dignity; equity and justice; the inherent value and Godly goodness of *every* human being. This gives us a 'leg up' in battling the Christian nationalistic ENTITLEMENT that's creeping across the country and, indeed, across God's church. It's a battle for the soul of our nation and the truth of our faith. And so, I say, let's get *to* it!

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