**“All are Welcome … Christ is Honored”**

Psalm 67

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15, 28-32

Matthew 15:21-28

 Pentecost 11

A Canaanite woman came out and was crying to Jesus, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. Lord, help me” And He answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

This weekend, we here are formally sending a **pastoral missionary** into the neighborhood of **his (somewhat) retirement**: the town of Hohenwald / Lewis County. **His mission is the mission of the Church: bring “all to the knowledge of God”, that INTO HIS MERCY “ALL ARE WELCOME … CHRIST IS HONORED”**. He “loved the **world**”, God did, “giving **for it** His only begotten Son, that **whosoever (anyone, from anywhere who)** **believes in Him**” (**honoring Christ even if “dogs” who He’d like to have as His Father’s “children”**), “wouldn’t **perish**, but **have eternal life**” … “**life from the dead**” … life **not as a dog in any sense anymore**, but **as children** **honoring His Son, Jesus**.

I have put at the bottom of our bulletins for years now that MISSION of the Church and, so, this congregation: “All are Welcome … Christ is honored”. It’s time to explain that … and all our readings for the day help with that explanation. All three relate that there are, really, just two kinds of people: one group are “**foreigners**” **to God’s kingdom**, “**dogs**” as Jesus is shown calling outsiders of that kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew, and **those in “rejection” of His Father’s grace (“those” on the one-hand)**. Then there are **“those”** who **“accept” the grace, thankful to receive it, as Jesus calls them: “children”, made-so by Him,** “**gathered” by Him**, “**joined” to Him**, **thrilled to** “**hold fast to His covenant” as Isaiah notes of them, actually “offering acceptable sacrifices and offerings … and doing-so specifically upon God’s altar**”.

And shown in these texts is that God’s mercy **abounds**, Pastor DeWitt is charged, this weekend, to formally bring that mercy and **Good News through Christ Jesus** to **every one** of the over 12,000 residents surrounding his own house (to **every last one**). He’s called (in that) to **not discriminate** as He proclaims mercy to sinners (of which **everyone is**): to people rich and poor, comfortably-employed and financially struggling, to the aged (and those more knowing their need for an eternal salvation) as well as young (and, maybe, yet naïve of that), to over 12,000 infants and grade schoolers and high schoolers and business people and widows and town trouble-makers (if there are some); all are to **know themselves welcome** to be “gathered” into the merciful “childhood” of ones under God the Father and honoring Christ by being “in Him”. The Gospel is **unrestricted** in the **to-whom that it’s aimed**, **ALL** are the **desired audience** of the grace and forgiveness upon repentance that it offers, **ALL-WHERE-PASTOR-DEWITT AND CATHY RESIDE** are in the immediate **mission field** that we’re sending this pastor to this weekend. He **also-has** mission responsibility beyond Lewis County, but there **specifically** **is** **his FIRST ALL**.

**Text**

And I say that because it clarifies **the Lord’s even** **FIRST** **SPECIFIC ALL**. For 2,000 years (**formally**), but for 4,000 **overall**, God cultivated a House of Israel to **be His** **through whom everyone else would also gain blessing** because of this House’s “**Seed**”. It was **necessary** that **they** **FIRST OBEDIENTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT**: that the **Blessing that they carried** was the gracious forgiveness won by the **Divine Sacrifice** provided by the Father to pay for every human sin. **THIS PEOPLE / THESE CHILDREN had to be God’s FIRST (so that others could join them) … they “honoring the Messiah (Christ the Savior) to come”** **FIRST**.

So Jesus displayed the **second half of the “Mission Statement” FIRST**, “Him **Honored** / God **Honored through Christ**” essential to **establish FIRST** since **THAT’S** the **purpose and the place** into which “All who are Welcome” are to **be gathered:** into **that context**, **that kingdom**, **that** **place**, **that** **PERSON** in Him, **Jesus**, **God’s Divine Son**. Jesus said, “I was sent **FIRST**” (which is the nuance that **Mark** highlights in **his account of this event**) “to the lost sheep in the house of Israel” … this to an “**outsider**” **to the kingdom**, a “**stranger**”, a “**foreigner**”, a **not yet “child”** but “**dog**” by the overall requirement to be **perfectly His Father’s**. He said this honestly (seemingly-cruelly, but accurately, to the **mission field**). He **wanted this one in it (as 1 of the ALL)** to also join the “childhood” of His Father, yet He had to tell her that **SHE WASN’T THAT UNTIL SHE WAS**, and (He was teaching His disciples in that event) that there’s a **deliberate process through only Himself, but also Him being actually brought to “doggish” people by the Gospel**. As Isaiah finishes: “The Lord God” (and **THROUGH HIS COVENANT PROCLAIMED FAITHFULLY BY HIS PEOPLE**), “**gathers the outcasts of Israel AND ALSO others besides those already gathered**”.

A Syro-phoenician (mixed-blooded) woman apparently **knew that better than the disciples did at that point**. Jesus “**withdrew**” from Galilee (as the text describes it) **to an over 40 miles away “withdrawal” to the “district of Tyre and Sidon”** to **bring mercy to this woman (and maybe a lot more in the area) as well as have documented this interaction**. Jesus **in** “**MISSION**” **to gather to Himself** is the point here. He “**withdrew” (and purposefully did) to the furthest that He’d ventured from the “House of Israel”**, yet “**CONFESSED**” in this **gathering of additional “children” for His Father’s House a particular way of being (in Him / “HONORING HIM”)** … **“CHILDREN” served “BREAD” as a good bit different LIFE than settling for being “dogs” lucky to get “crumbs”**.

But Jesus addresses **both populations** … as **we must too**. Jesus “**withdrew**” and **went to the mission field Himself**,then **sends** disciples “starting in Jerusalem, then onto Judea and, **then**, **to ends of the earth**”. I know myself sent **FIRST formally** to the often “lost sheep of the House of Israel” (to you who are “children” of God and ought, always, to **act like that**, **feeding you (for Christ) the “bread” of forgiveness when you don’t act like children but confess**, **reminding you** of the mercy of God’s adoption of you by baptism (a **“CHILD OF GOD” MADE BY BAPTISM AND FAITH**), **useful as you ought to be** as **missionaries yourselves** to gather others into the divine “family”. My **FIRST CALLING** is sent to “**equip” you for “works of ministry**” (which is to gather and help catechize / teach additional people to “honor Christ”).

**“All are Welcome” here**, but **“Christ must always be Honored” here** … and we’ve built even **the facilities** to help **remind ourselves of that**. Our parking lot (set-aside from the rest of the world**) begins the journey** through, then, our front doors always ready to be opened to **ALL THE WORLD**. Our foyer, then, and educational wing **pointing towards Christ who promises to be where His Words are preached (the cross represents that over the altar table) and the bread and wine of His promised body and blood (main focus up front and, hopefully, in everyone’s up-front awareness and worship and praise)**. The what stands as a **bridge** between the pews that are meant for the **WHOLE WORLD NEEDING DIVINE WORDS** and the **INTIMATE TABLE OF GOD’S MEAL AND FELLOWSHIP** is the **font of baptism**. On the back of Pastor DeWitt’s “bio” page is our **invitation (yet caution)** that explains our “**desire**” that “**ALL THE WORLD HONOR CHRIST**” **WITH OUR COMMITMENT** **TO DO IT** by an **out-loud** **apostolic confession to that content of faith**. “**All are welcome**”, but “**Christ** **is Honored**”, and that **Honor is RECOGNIZED in the public “fellowship of the altar”** … and **those who share that apostolic confessional are served God’s bread from that altar**. …..

**Application**

I look forward to **my other duty: called also to extend myself beyond this congregation to (with Pastor DeWitt) NEW FOLKS, also in Hohenwald and Lewis County**. One of my fond memories (that I hope that Pastor DeWitt will allow me to add to memories like this) is a house-church I helped with, preaching there when I was back at the seminary. In attendance, one time, were 2 men, a young boy, and a literal dog, and one of the older men was our musician (playing a very small keyboard with one finger and slowly upon his lap). I remember how uniquely attentive the dog was as a listener and participant (the best singer of the bunch of us I think).

There are **exciting ventures awaiting us** **beyond** Thompson’s Station / Spring Hill. And exciting experiences in the mission field (beyond useful to God’s kingdom) are **contagious**: **the energies there (in the newness of the Gospel) become your own as you relate to them**. **Pastor DeWitt** needs your prayers but also **your** **participation and help** our sending of **him** has never been just **his duty alone**. **Pastor Alebachew** needs your prayers but also your **participation and help in his context** … our sending of **him** has never been just **his duty alone**. And the rest of Williamson and Maury and Marshall counties need your prayers but also your **participation and help and Gospel**. May the Lord make **alive in each one of us** **this “Mission” of “Welcoming ALL”** for the **expressed purpose of (ALL, with new additions constantly brought by us) “Honoring Christ”**. ….

You should know that **we** “**Gentiles**” were the “dogs” to whom Jesus came also in this Tyre and Sidon “withdrawal” trip that He made … and “even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table”. How **blest** **WE’VE ALL BEEN** to be gathered closer then, just, under the table, but **AT the Master’s table as “children”**. Thanks be to God, in +Jesus’ name. Amen.

May the peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.