



“Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, ‘Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.’” (Mt. 15: 10-11)

Sometimes our values collide. We then have a choice to make- which value will prevail? Which "good" is better? We are called to live with the tension between our values even when it is uncomfortable and even when some people may not like - and indeed may protest - against what we say.

Today is one of those Sunday's where the Gospel reading and our world today collide in rather pointed ways. I like to think of this as an

example of God’s sense of humor in the midst of trying circumstances.

Our First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the exercise of free speech or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The values of the First Amendment are central to our democracy and yet you can see in these words the potential for conflict among the values expressed.

Government stay out of regulating or requiring a certain type of religious expression.

Government stay out of regulating what can be said or what the press may print.

Government stay out of putting barriers or restrictions on peaceably gathering in groups.

Government you are going to have to permit people to sue you when you do wrong.

We all know that there are many court cases interpreting what our founding fathers meant when these words were written. There have been court cases over what constitutes a religion and thus what is entitled to protection. Whether it was permissible to smoke peyote as part of a religious ceremony when peyote was a controlled substance and thus illegal to smoke under Food and Drug regulations. Whether it was permissible to slaughter a chicken as part of a voodoo religious ritual when it would normally be against cruelty to animals regulations.

There have certainly been cases over what constitutes free speech. The court has decided that hate speech is in some cases protected speech and in some cases it is not. It is not permissible speech to yell “fire” in a crowded room when the reason for yelling “fire” is a prank or when a fire is not actually occurring.

Permits are often required when a large group wants to assemble for logistical reasons, including law enforcement protection. Is it lawful to block traffic lanes of a highway to register your protest? You must be at least 50 feet back from a polling place entrance if you are advocating for

a particular candidate on Election Day.

And, we certainly see the government sued- among the more well-known recent protests are those about Standing Rock and the pipeline.

Jesus reminds us that it is not what goes into us that defiles a person but what comes out of our mouth. When we profess to love God and neighbor and then we speak or act in hateful ways, we are sinning. We are distancing ourselves from the God that created us and loves us.

In rather earthy terms Jesus responds to Peter who asks for clarification. Jesus says: Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defines. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

What we say and what we do show what we believe. Do we believe in a God of love or a God of hate - or we even deny that there is a God. Our words and actions reveal our moral and ethical framework.

The Canaanite woman approaches Jesus and asks for mercy. She did not ask for healing of her daughter although that is clearly on her mind and the source of her distress. Mercy, though, is compassion, grace, pity, empathy. The woman asks for Jesus to see her as a mother who needs hope and grace and desires healing. Not for herself but for her daughter.

This passage is interpreted in a variety of ways. One way is to consider it as a model for our relationship with Jesus. We are empowered to seek grace, compassion and healing directly from Jesus. We do not need anyone or anything else to intercede between Jesus and ourselves.

It can be seen as someone with low power in the world approaching someone of much greater power and prestige and, in the end, being heard and responded to. A woman of another culture approaching Jesus and being heard and responded to. A woman in a very patriarchal society approaching a man of a different culture and a man who was recognized as an important teacher at the least.

This passage has been used as an example of perseverance- that if you will keep praying and keep faith, ultimately your prayers will be answered.

The woman's reply to Jesus: Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table, as causing Jesus to turn from a limited ministry only to the Jews to a wider ministry to the world. A challenge to how Jesus thought of himself – the audacity of it all! And yet, taking this view, the invitation to all to love and know God and neighbor.

And the answer from Jesus: Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed instantly.

We all have had experiences of praying for a certain outcome and yet the answer God sends is

not what we wanted. My recent prayers have included prayers for peace and grace in how we treat each other. Those prayers have certainly not been answered when we read and hear about the situation in Charlottesville Virginia. They have not been answered when I see the level of anger and bitterness and resentment expressed in our community and within families and workplaces. I puzzle at what has led to such a fundamental change in our society that even those who profess to follow Jesus spout some of the most awful things and become violent too often.

Life is not fair. We don't always get what we want. You only have to look at Jesus and his death on the cross to see how we live in a world that is broken.

As Bishop Curry wrote this week:

"There is darkness in our land as the white supremacist riot in Charlottesville last weekend demonstrated with sickening and deadly clarity. But we follow Jesus, about whose coming the Gospel of John said: "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it." And it cannot! So when the evil one divides us from one another through the darkness of racism, bigotry and intolerance, we must witness ever more steadfastly to the light and the power of the risen Christ to overcome hatred, cease division and bind us all ever more closely to one another." (August 16, 2017)

Our challenge is to consider our values and most especially when those values appear to compete or be in conflict. I absolutely believe in free speech. I do not believe in hate speech - defined as speech which denigrates another. Our Baptismal Covenant and vow to respect the dignity of every human being is paramount.

I believe in the First Amendment right to peaceably assemble. I do not believe in assemblies that become violent - either to people or to property. Trashing another's property and hurting another person is not within God's call to us to love our neighbor.

And, certainly, killing another person believing something different from me violates the commandment to not murder.

Jesus has told us clearly what is expected of us. Be mindful of what comes out of your mouth. Speak up so that your faith will be made known to others. Speak up so that your love of God and of neighbor is the value that frames your life. Speak up so that Jesus says to you: Your faith has made you well. **Amen.**