

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 15
Year A

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
Psalm 67
Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

The prophet Micah coined the popular phrase, “Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with your God.” However, years before Micah, the prophet Isaiah made a similar statement, “Maintain justice, and do what is right.” Both of these prophets are encouraging us to consider how we treat others as a sign of our commitment to God. Our reading from Isaiah tells us who we are to include in our sphere of influence.

I will never understand why the creators of our lectionary decide to leave out verses within a passage, but we have an example of that today in this passage from Isaiah. In the verses excluded from the reading, the prophet tells who should be included in God’s Kingdom – basically anyone who honors the sabbath and refrains from doing evil. In this group, Isaiah includes foreigners and eunuchs. These were two groups who had been historically excluded from the Temple. We see a widening of the circle of those who are to receive comfort from God.

Before we delve into who we should include, let’s look to whom this message was addressed. Is it really aimed at us?

The first people who heard these words were those exiled to Babylon who had returned home to Jerusalem and found strangers living in their houses. The second group were those Jews who were not taken into captivity because they were deemed unimportant. The final group were the non-Jews and foreigners who were relocated into the Jewish territories by the conquering empires. You might wonder how we fit into this.

Let us consider what happens in many places after natural disasters. When people fled from New Orleans in the face of Hurricane Katrina, some decided not to return. Others return to find their homes uninhabitable. For some who were slow to return, found others occupying their homes, thinking these houses were abandoned. This is what happened in Jerusalem. How did the prophet expect them to behave towards one another?

Isaiah does not get into the property issue at all. He is focused on the religious side of life. Who could worship God in the Temple? For Isaiah, the list was long. “The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of then Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant...” God is not one to exclude anyone. Isaiah gives us a very broad scope of believers to be included.

He continues to say that all of these will be brought to God’s holy mountain and be joyful in God’s house of prayer. The most controversial part of this for the devoted Jews was the phrase, “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Everyone is invited. There is no

call for people to abandon their own religious beliefs. There is no exclusion of people because of their sexual orientation. There is definitely no barring of people who are different from the mainstream group. ALL are invited to come into God's Temple.

This is the standard we are called to maintain. There is to be no distinctions made for any reason. ALL are welcome to join in the worship of God. God is calling us to throw open the doors of our church to anyone who desires to walk with God. And, as the Iona Community says, "Come, it is Jesus who invites us to meet Him here."