

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

Let me tell you something about the fiddle camp that I have attended for two years now: no one is too good a musician to play with anyone else. On the first day of camp I met Carol in our Irish fiddle class. She told me about other camps where it's all about who you know and how fast you can pick up a tune. Where there's a hierarchy and self-selection process going on – there are the teaching artists, there's the “inner circle” around them, and then there's everyone else. Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp doesn't operate that way at all. A big part of any fiddle camp are the jams, where you sit in a circle and go around in turn naming a tune that everyone then plays together. At Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp there are organized jams led every evening by the teaching artists. Some are slower so that beginners can get the hang of it, and some are faster. But no one is turned away. No one is made to feel inadequate if they can't keep up. Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp is fiercely inclusive.

I bring up what happened at fiddle camp because our nation is in the throes of an anguished debate about inclusion and exclusion. The neo-Nazi display of white supremacy that took place in Charlottesville last weekend was pure evil. And I want to be clear – there is no moral equivalency between the two sides who were there. Neo-Nazis have a fantasy of going back to some imagined past where white people hold all the power, where the word “civilization” refers to northern Europe and where Jews, blacks, gay people, women, Native Americans, Muslims and anyone else who is not white, male, Christian and straight is considered inadequate and inferior and better know their place.

Let me be clear: white supremacy has no place in Christianity. White supremacy is evil; it is idolatry of the vilest kind. Those who claim that the Bible backs up a vision of

separation and exclusion are wrong. They are heretics. The theme that permeates the Bible is this: God's kingdom includes everyone. Everyone. Every human being is made in the image of God. And our scripture readings this morning underline that theme.

For centuries, Christians have persecuted the Jews, calling them "Christ-killers," and claiming that by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, they are damned. In today's reading from Romans, Paul himself rejects that view. "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable," he writes. God does not give up on God's people, ever. Through all the history of the people of Israel, even through all the times that God's people have turned away to worship idols, God's promises of mercy and steadfast love shine through. In the book of Acts, in the middle of an evangelistic sermon to pagan philosophers, Paul makes the case that God created all the races "from one man." (Acts 17:26) The book of Genesis makes it clear that all of humankind is created in the image of God. And because of that fact, every human life is of infinite and equal value. (Genesis 9:5-6)

Imagine a trumpet blaring from the highest mountaintop, announcing the gathering of all the people in the world. This is not just any gathering – it's not a U2 concert or a presidential inauguration or the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. This is the vision from the prophet Isaiah: God's people gathered joyfully in prayer. Prayer. And the most amazing detail is God's promise to bring foreigners to the holy mountain. Foreigners and outcasts. Those who call on the name of the Lord, those who hold fast to the covenant, no matter who they are, no matter where they are from, are welcomed. Imagine that – people who look different, people who speak with accents, people whom at some point we may have called names. All these people are welcome in the kingdom of heaven. There is no "us" and "them" in the kingdom of heaven.

God's vision looks like this: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. Another theme that pervades the Bible is that of welcoming the stranger as a guest. Abraham and Sarah learned God's will for them when they entertained three mysterious strangers. God brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and created a new community. The laws of Moses include instructions for treating resident aliens as if they were citizens. Jesus' own ministry often took place around a dinner table, where he was invited as a guest. He would eat and drink with anyone and everyone. He sent his own disciples out with instructions to receive the welcome and depend upon the hospitality of those whose towns and homes they entered.

In this morning's Gospel reading, a foreign woman comes running after Jesus and his disciples, shouting for mercy and healing for her daughter. She was a Canaanite, a different ethnic group, the kind that Jews stayed away from. She probably dressed differently, worshipped different gods. I imagine that she spoke with an accent. And she was female. Three strikes against her. The disciples are all ready to draw a big line barring her way. "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us," they cry. Imagine this scene, the disciples on one side, the woman on the other, and Jesus in the middle.

And then, in a moment that shows us just how human Jesus really is, he calls her a name. He calls her a dog. It's a racial slur, something that Jews called Canaanites. But the woman doesn't let Jesus off the hook. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table, she replies. She claims the promise that God gives. She claims her God-given status as God's own beloved child.

Imagine the courage it took that Canaanite woman to claim her invitation to God's table. I am worthy to be fed, she said to Jesus. I may not look like you. I may speak with

an accent. I may not worship in the same way as you, but I am worthy. She understands that God's fundamental nature is to be merciful. And in courage and hope, she claims that mercy, that hospitality for herself.

That is a third theme that permeates the Bible: God's purpose for humanity is a beloved community. God's purpose for humanity is abundance and reconciliation and steadfast love. Racism is evil. It is sinful. There is no place for exclusion, no place for racial hatred, no place for prejudice. All are welcome. All the peoples of the world will be gathered on God's holy mountain.

I'll bet that most people in this country thought that the Nazi message was defeated when Hitler was defeated. But what the events of the past week demonstrate is that we have to be vigilant against bigotry and racial hatred every single day. "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles," says Jesus, "but what comes out of it." And when what comes out is racist spew, the idolatry of 'blood and soil,' we must stand against it. There is no place for white supremacy in our church or in our democracy. It is sinful and must be condemned. And I give you my word that I will not be silent.

Back to fiddle camp: as much as its inclusiveness felt like the kingdom of heaven, fiddle camp only lasts one week. You have to come down the mountain – literally, from 9,000 feet in elevation – and back to the tasks and routines of daily living. But what I brought back with me were all the tunes that I learned. They are still in my head and in my fingers. The classes I took and the people I met and the music that I played changed me. They gave me a vision of what a beloved community can be. All of that is God's work.

That's why on Thursday, we invited new students and their families to come and eat lunch here. It's God's work to welcome strangers as our guests. It's God's work to build a

beloved community here in this community. And it is God's work to call out white supremacy and racial hatred wherever they rear their heads. It is God's work to foster a society where every one of God's children can live in God's abundance and God's reconciliation and God's steadfast love.

Just as it is God's work that you are here. Every single Sunday, each one of you comes into to this house of prayer begging for mercy and forgiveness. Every single Sunday, each one of you comes forward to Christ's table with your hands extended, hungry, asking for bread, looking for a welcome. And Christ gives it to you. So come. The invitation is for you. Receive God's mercy. Come. Eat and drink at Christ's table. Come, eat and be satisfied.

And then go in peace. Wherever you go this week, to work, to school, to the store, to the golf course, to the senior center, to visit a friend – go and see the face of God in every person you meet.