

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It's not what goes in, but what comes out that defiles the heart. It's not what we take in, it's not questionable cleanliness, questionable beliefs, that we take into ourselves that defiles us, it's what we put back out into the world, it's what comes out of us that defiles because it comes out of our hearts, it defiles because it is connected to our very being. What we hold in our hearts, what we put out into the world, speaks to who we are, what we believe, how we think others in the world should behave, should be treated. But, it's not simply having that defilement in us, taking in these beliefs, it's the power that comes when we espouse those beliefs, when our being is defiled as we let the corruption of our heart pass out of our mouths back into the world. For it is in our hearts that we hold evil intentions, it is in our hearts that we murder, it is in our hearts that we bear false witness, that we slander those who speak up and speak out against the order we wish to protect.

This is evil that is on display in our country right now. This is evil that is on display when we play chicken with nuclear weapons. This is evil that is on display as white supremacists gather en masse to spew more hatred into the world. This is evil that is on display when national leadership fails to condemn the attacks of these supremacists and instead bears false witness to violence on both sides, that slanders those who have died, their only crime being that they were unwilling to let hate go unchecked.

The evil intentions of our hearts, the evil that we are seeing in our country right now, are an emotional response to this world. It is not rational. It is not logical. One can fool themselves into thinking that it is, but looking at the events that continue to unfold across this country, including the defense of white supremacists, the defense of the President for

not condemning those who seek to divide, the equating of a violent, murderous alt-right with citizens who refuse to let our country descend into the evil practices of our past, it speaks to how we cannot divorce ourselves from our emotional responses to this world. And when we allow these emotional responses of hate and fear to dominate, to spread out into the world, we are defiled as the words leave our mouths, as our actions (or lack thereof) speak for us.

But how do we respond to these emotions, how do we keep our heads in situations where the world seems to be falling apart all around us, how do we reconcile that which seeks to defile with an understanding of faith that teaches love above all else, love for self, love for neighbor, love for God? It begins with understanding that we must love ourselves in order to love our neighbor, and we cannot be loving ourselves if we are advocating for white supremacy, if we are defending those who defend white supremacists, if we are saying that there is violence on both sides. We cannot be loving ourselves when we only let hate and fear into our hearts. It's impossible to love ourselves if there is no room for love of our neighbor in our heart. Total self-love, that total self-love which declares that anyone who is other than us is subordinate to us, is not love, but rather pride and sin that sit in our hearts, feeding off of our fear and hate and pain that comes from not knowing love, from not sharing love with anyone else. And when that sin, that evil, is shared with others it forms a bond of solidarity that cannot be easily broken. It forms a bond that is labeled as family, as brotherhood, but is the farthest from those things for there can be no trust, there can be no relationship, without the presence of love.

With the evil that resides in our heart, we are defiled. We are defiled as it leaves our lips and spreads that evil into the world. It is part of the bleak reality that is our shared reality in creation. It is hard for us to avoid it, either within our own hearts, or as others spread it out into the world directed at others who are also embracing evil, directed at each other as we struggle with what to do with the evil that is being celebrated and defended in our world (even if that is by a minority), evil that seeks to divide, to cause anger, to cause further hate and pain. Evil that seeks to pit us against one another, even if we don't agree with the people we feel we must defend, because the other side is just as bad, right?

There is an answer to this evil. There is an answer to our lips being defiled, to the reality of our hearts. The answer lies in our faith. The answer comes to us today through the Canaanite woman.

Here is someone who demands to be seen and heard. And yet, the disciples block her. They tell Jesus to send this annoying woman away. They speak from a place of power and privilege to limit access to a healer who has only come for one people, God's chosen people. And yet, the woman demands to be seen, to be heard, to speak with Christ, to have her daughter healed. This is not for herself, she is fighting for her daughter. And as the disciples seek to dismiss her, she politely tells them no, that she will be heard because she has faith, she holds in her heart love for another, and will not be going anywhere until Christ acknowledges her and answers her. Jesus recognizes within this woman her faith, the love that she holds, the fact that she is seeking the healing of her daughter and refuses to back down as those in authority try to push her to the side, and understands that the faithful will fight for what is right and just in this world. Jesus understands that

righteousness will triumph over defilement, if we simply claim it for ourselves and for those whom we love.

When will we be like the Canaanite woman and demand to be healed of the evil that defiles us in this world? When will we recognize that all deserve to be heard by Christ? That our hurt, our pain, our oppression, our persecution, and our ability to make others feel this same way, can be conquered if we simply have faith, trust in Christ, demand to be healed, and hold onto love for each other.

How do we hold this reality of healing that we seek, that we demand of Christ, and honor that our understanding of all must also by definition and by the reality of our faith also include those who are perpetrating the evil? How do we reconcile within ourselves that they too will receive grace and forgiveness? It is easy, far too easy, to label evil and dismiss it. It is easy, far too easy, to ignore evil and hope someone else takes care of it. It is easy, far too easy, to see evil in this world, decry it, speak out against it, define and shame it, and fail to also love those who perpetrate it, to hold the reality of the hurt, pain, anger, disillusionment that they have to be feeling, the reality that they are not, currently cannot, feel love in this world.

We reconcile the grace and forgiveness of God readily accessible for all, if we simply claim it for ourselves, by understanding and reminding ourselves that Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has already triumphed over sin and death. It is up to us to accept this reality. It is up to us to know that in accepting this reality we also come to understand that this victory of Christ does not stop us from being evil, from hating each other, from violence being in this world, from ignorance being perceived as an acceptable way to go

through life. This reality of Christ's victory does however afford us the opportunity to recognize our own ability to claim love, to claim justice, to claim equality, to call out sin and evil at work in this world. And, we must choose to live against the powers of evil that are so easy for us to embrace, all while holding those who are caught up in evil's embrace, intoxicated by its false sense of power and purpose, loving them because they cannot love themselves. This does not mean that we defend them. This does not mean that we do not speak out, that we do not stand on the front lines as we march against them, but it does mean we do these things because we love their broken and lost souls because God does. And, if we are Christians, if we are called to live a life modeled on the life and ministry of Christ, we can't help but love them, for that is what has been left for us by Christ.

We must also hold those who we see as on the sidelines, who do not condemn, who do not jump into action, who do not march on the frontlines, who do not post on facebook. Life is hard enough for many in this world, this country, without also being asked to solve the systemic evil that resides in our society. Many people simply cannot solve this problem. It is not because they are evil. It is not because they are complicit. It is because they do not know how to respond and we refuse to teach them, holding them to a standard that cannot be met without our help. It is because they struggle enough in their own life that inviting the presence and reality of more evil in this world would tip them over the edge. These people are not evil. These people are just as loved by God. It is our responsibility to hold them too, so that they may know they are loved, educate so that they too can stand against the larger injustices of this world, rather than being subsumed by the evil that they privately face every day. Inaction is not the same as approval. Inaction is simply the reality

that there is plenty of evil in this world that we never see. Where we see inaction we must again show love, patience, acceptance, we must show God.

When we claim our faith, when we demand healing of Christ, it is ours. If we don't, then evil is allowed to come into us, it is allowed to reside deep in our hearts, and it is allowed to defile as we spread that evil back out into the world. This happens when we don't hold the reality that is the transformational power of God's love for creation in our hearts, understanding that it is through loving our selves, our neighbors, and God, that we find the light that shines in the darkness. We must hold those who perpetrate evil with the same love and forgiveness that God grants to us, because that is our call as Christians. It does not mean that we excuse that evil, that we lessen that evil, but rather that we name that evil and offer the salvation that is granted through Christ to the lost and broken souls who want to hold on so desperately to something, that they've created a home for evil within their hearts. We have all been saved by Christ, we all can and must hold the love of Christ in our hearts, and it's past time that we start living into that reality.

Amen.