

Pentecost 12A - Comments/questions on the lessons for August 16, 2026

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

- These words come from what scholars refer to as Third Isaiah, which is addressed to those who have just returned from exile. God promises that the people of God now will move beyond the Israelites to include all peoples who wish to “join themselves to the Lord.” The lesson invites the Israelites to see that they do not exist simply for themselves. They exist for all who call upon God. How might we shape ourselves so that we do not exist simply for ourselves but for all those who would call upon God?
- What does it mean to you to “keep the sabbath, and do not profane it”?

Psalm 67

- Our psalm today is a song of praise and invites us to lift up our voices and praise God for all that God has done. What do you praise God for this day?
- We hear in the psalm what we heard in Isaiah: God’s ways are meant for all people. They are not limited to Israel alone. So, when we pray,

Let your way be known upon earth,

Your saving health among all nations. (67:2)

we can let this be a plea to God for saving health and healing for all the divisions in our country, for saving health for all people, all countries.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

- We are nearing the end of Paul’s discussion and argument about the Jews here in this lesson. Paul identifies here that God used the rejection and “disobedience” of the Jews in order that the message of Jesus might extend to the Gentiles. The Gentiles have received mercy because of “their disobedience.” Yet, Paul is convinced that if the Gentiles receive mercy because of the disobedience of the Jews, then the Jews will also receive mercy just as the Gentiles did. The situation is a concrete example of what Paul declared in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good. All is seen and defined in the light of God’s mercy. How are we called to see others in the light of God’s mercy? Is there anyone that we see outside of God’s mercy?

Matthew 15:10-28

- How are the two parts of the gospel connected? Do you see any thematic connection between the discussion of Jesus about what goes in and out of one’s mouth and heart and the approach and conversation with the Canaanite woman?
- By referring to the woman as a Canaanite, the gospel has identified her as one of the long-time enemies of Israel. The text invites us to see this “enemy” as a person with real needs and desperation, as one who deserves mercy. What “enemy” are you called to see as a person? How can you see them with new eyes, with the eyes of God?
- In our present climate, this story becomes even more important. As our country becomes more polarized, how can we see those of opposing beliefs or political persuasions with the eyes of God as children of God? In our national struggle for racial justice, how can we see one another and treat one another as children of God and work toward tearing down systems of injustice and abuse?
- The reaction of Jesus to the woman initially is harsh and judgmental. How do you reconcile this reaction with your understanding of Jesus as Son of God?
- By her persistence, the Canaanite woman changes the mind of Jesus about whether he will help her. How can we develop the same confidence to change the mind of God?