

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15, 28-32

Matthew 15:21-28

God looks for fruit. It's legit, this pursuit, this search. God is the one who establishes the vine, a choice vine, cultivated and rich in vitality, known to produce excellent fruit. The vine sends nutrients and life to the branch so that the branch generates fruit that is succulent, abounding with flavor, bringing joy to the eater.

What sort of fruit is God looking for? Does God look for mercy in the lives of His people? I suspect that He does. Is God looking for mercy in you? Yes, I believe that that is true. Are you surprised by the idea that God might be looking for the fruit that pleases Him in your life?

Longsuffering is a virtue we don't hear much about anymore. Longsuffering describes someone who stays calm and keeps a "long fuse" when people test their temper or when life brings heavy stress. The opposite of longsuffering is petulance, short-tempered, resentful. That is bad fruit. In the book of Isaiah, God laments that He had poured so much time, energy, and resources into His vineyard, that He dug it and cleared it of stones, built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine vat in it. He went looking for fruit and it yielded only wild grapes, fruit which would set your teeth on edge (Isaiah 5:1-7).

How many of y'all want to be beautiful? Not in some glamour kind of way, but wholesome, and lovely of spirit, carrying yourself with Christlike virtue – how many of y'all want to be beautiful? What does that mean? How does one get there? We don't manufacture beauty. None of you can construct spiritual magnificence for yourself. God is the Potter. We are the clay (Jeremiah 18:1-6). How many of y'all know beauty when you see it? Are you familiar with God's work in the lives of sinners, how the common man, the common woman becomes uncommonly beautiful? The lady in our Gospel reading, the woman that I like to call "Good-Lady-Crums," is she beautiful? Why is she beautiful? How did it happen?

She's a Canaanite, the unlikeliest of spiritual beauties. Canaan was the son of Ham who was the son of Noah. Ham disrespected his father and Noah pronounced a curse upon Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27). The curse proved to be prophetic because Canaan became the progenitor of a grotesquely idolatrous tribe. Religious prostitution, child sacrifice, poly-theistic worship – the Canaanites were mired in deep darkness (Leviticus 18; Deuteronomy 12). And this singular woman comes to Him who is the light of the world (John 8:12). She begs: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon" (Matthew 15:22). Is there any pain like that of a mother whose child is suffering? Love and pain and hope are all jumbled up in Good-Lady-Crums.

Her prayer is a theological song, an acclimation of Divine Truth. Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. Jesus *is* the Son of David, the Promised Messianic King (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jesus is the one who sits on the throne of the universe and will be hung on His throne, a cross outside of Jerusalem. Christ's reign is full of grace, and He will extend His kingdom to the unlikeliest of places (among us). Longsuffering; our culture teaches us to whine when we don't get what we want. Our culture teaches us to become violent, to blame others, to lash out and

many do. It is disgraceful, but many do. A victim mentality infests our culture. A victim mentality is a barrier to beauty. The Potter was at work on the clay of Good-Lady-Crumbs. He's looking for fruit, drawing it from her. "He did not answer her a word" (Matthew 15:23). What do you think of that?

Some people would say that that seems cold. Is that what you think? "Man, that Jesus-fellow is a bit icy, all that power and He doesn't dish? Heartless!" Is that what you think? How is God at work in your life? What are His tools? What, do you suppose, is God's endgame with us? Our heart goes out to Good-Lady-Crumbs. Help her! Bless her! Release her daughter from the demon's grip! Answer her prayer! Relieve her pain, cast out the darkness and shine the light of Your mercy! That's my reaction. The disciples just want her to hit the road. "Send her away, for she is crying out after us" (Matthew 15:24). The stony-faced Messiah affirms his position: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). The mother's prayer is then distilled to its primal essence. Kneeling before Him, she said: "Lord, help me" (Matthew 15:25). I know that you have prayed that prayer.

Christ is the author of good fruit, the progenitor of virtue, the source and the force of love and humility and mercy and patience and fortitude and modesty. We become beautiful in Him. Jesus knew what humility was within Good-Lady-Crumbs because He put it there. By faith, she was attached to Him. By faith, humility was wonderfully alive in this beleaguered woman. By faith, Good-Lady-Crumbs participated in Christ's life. By faith, she was authentically beautiful. Christ's humility, in her, made her beautiful. And Jesus was going to show the world what beauty truly is. And He said: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26). It may seem odd to you that Jesus is looking for fruit in this way. It may seem odd to you that a conductor would draw the sweetest of music out of a member of the orchestra by using such terse verbiage. It may seem odd to you that God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9).

God's way is a cross. God's way is a sacrificial lamb, *the* Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God's ways are a suffering Servant, a crucified Messiah, an innocent sacrifice. God's way is not to save us from death but to save us through death. The world can't see it, but you do. The world teaches you to indulge your vanity, to put yourself above others, to fight against the Potter and do things your way. Pride is not beautiful. Selfishness smells of hell's dank domain. Jesus looks for fruit. He is the vine who feeds us with His death and resurrection (John 15:5). His virtue is dynamic. Christ's love invades the believer and makes us more than what we are by nature. You know it. You've lived it. You feed on Him. Humility sang in Good-Lady-Crumbs. It was a Christological aria. Faith erupted and the words are priceless: Yes, Lord, true, Lord, indeed Lord, I am a dog and I don't deserve your mercy, your tenderness, but I will place myself at your feet and gladly take whatever crumbs fall from your table. "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table" (Matthew 15:27). Jesus drew that sublime humility out of her for you to see, for you to see and recognize, for you to see and enjoy immeasurable beauty.

Jesus finds fruit. The Lord goes looking and He finds it. He was overjoyed by Good-Lady-Crumbs. "O woman, great is your faith!" (Matthew 15:28). Not just "woman" but "O woman!" And the Lord answered her prayer. From that very moment, her daughter was healed. The

triumph of Jesus' death and resurrection burst in on that young lass. Our Lord, in an act of supreme righteousness, crushed the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Jesus shed His blood, died as our innocent substitute, and Satan's kingdom fell (Colossians 2:15). That truth burst in on the daughter held in darkness.

Easter is what we feast on. The vine feeds the branch and the fruit of Christ's sacrifice is a part of your daily life. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). You receive the triumph, the beauty, and the power of Good Friday and Easter as you eat His body and drink His blood. He nurtures your faith. He shares His virtue, His holiness, His love. He cares for this vineyard, Christ the King Lutheran Church. He tills the soil of our hearts. He digs out the winepress of our salvation. He sets the watchtower of His grace to protect and defend the life He engenders. He looks for fruit and we shall give it to Him. We protect the vulnerable. We confess the faith. We forgive and we serve and we proclaim that He is the reason. That is authentic beauty. Wholesome and humble and faithful and true – Good-Lady-Crumbs is our sister. We all belong to Christ the King. Christ's life is among us and He is forming us into His image (Romans 8:29). God's endgame is Christ's beauty being our eternal possession.