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.

“How Jesus Sees Us (Honestly)” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
(8/20/2023, Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Let's pray. Almighty God made the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

It is, I think, an unassailable, essential truth that the song of the summer in 2022 was beyond SES break my soul. And I really don't think it has been replaced. So as far as I'm concerned, it's also the song of the summer of 2023. And for those of you who do not know what I'm talking about this great Texan and artist, I will pray for you. But I also want you to know that not only did that album Renaissance debut at number one, it's also that song is her 20th, top 10 hit. There's only two artists in the history of popular music that have had 20, top 10 hits. Sir Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson. So Beyonce way to go, Texas, okay, I bring it up. Why am I talking about this, she has a lyric in that song. It's in the beginning. And she says, I'm looking for a new foundation. And this is something I see happen a lot. You know, many people see that song as a dance anthem to the changing post COVID economy, which in many ways it is. But we've all had this reset in life. In the last few years, in some ways, whether you asked for it or didn't ask for it. And this new foundation, she says she's looking for something I find many people are doing. And I would like to invite us because I think this is what Jesus does in Matthew 15, is to explore our foundational assumptions about people. You know, Christianity right now needs a bit of a, if not a new foundation, a renewed Foundation, something of a reset. It's not a great moment for us in terms of our in terms of public opinion. This religion centered around the teaching and work of Jesus Christ, who people flocked to him, like Ticketmaster, when the Taylor Swift tickets drop, and now people run away. Many places, maybe not here so much, you're all here. But there's a lot of places where Jesus is not it doesn't win you friends at the cocktail party, you know, go to the next cocktail party and ask anyone, Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? And see if the people flocked to you. So you know, I'm around Jesus, people, a lot. Professionals, amateurs like yourselves. And I hear things all the time. That makes me want to open the Bible

to Matthew 15. And read this passage, because I think it is one of the core and most brilliant insights that Jesus Christ had, it changed the future of Western civilization, you would not have Freud, Jung or cognitive neurobiology. If you didn't have Jesus, discovering, or at least naming out loud, what people are really like, and we don't like it. And so we always want to get out the theological Whiteout, and move on from this, but I want to with Jesus, underline it, highlight it, circle it, and put a sticky note. So we don't forget it. And it's this thing is what he does is to diagnose, I think, what you are actually suffering from, as a human being. And I think that if you get this, it changes your entire perspective towards the people you live with, towards yourself and towards God. And I want to talk about that. And I also want to talk about Bob Dylan in the 80s. Jesus at the beginning of this passage is dealing with some criticism he's received from the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees were part of his religious tribe, who are Christians. And they were always criticizing Jesus. Here, they're criticizing him because he is allowing his disciples to eat and drink foods and other things and that they're not supposed to because they will make you religiously unclean. And there's this an idea that something from the outside can make you unclean spiritually, that it can pollute you in some sense, and we don't have the same religious understandings around food necessarily today. But we do have this ongoing persistent belief that things from the outside can corrupt you on the inside. You hear this in many ways where I'm hearing a lot and Now is in the conversation around banning books, in school libraries and other places. The idea that people are are these blank slates. And if we let them read a book that has some naughty bits, they will suddenly have ideas about doing naughty things that never would have occurred to them before. And then they'll go do naughty things. And there will be no sin, right? Because that's what happened every time there's been a cloistered religious community where there is no influence from the outside world where you're farming and you're just reading the scriptures. We never hear stories about cloistered religious communities that do bad things.

This is Jesus's insight that this stuff is baked in. Listen and understand. He says, It's like Hans and Franz, hear me now and believe me later. It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person but what comes out of the mouth that defiles verse 19, for out of a heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness slander, many religious traditions say don't do those things. Jesus tells us where they come from, deep down. Whether you want them or not, they're coming up from within, baked in. Apologies to John Jacques Rousseau, the human being is not some pure thing that just gets corrupted by outside influences. It's baked in, it starts out that way we come off the assembly line with the flaws built in, sort of like GM in the 70s.

I mean, have you ever thinking of yourself as basically a good person found thoughts that pop into your head that you're like, oh, my gosh,

where did that get down, down boy. Or you wake up with a dream. You've had a dream you wake up and you're like, you know, if you had your if you slept with pearls, you'd be clutching them. Kiss gondola can't believe I dream that violent things, all kinds of things coming up. Have you ever sort of heard yourself say a really cruel thing. But because you're in the heat of the argument with the other person, the last thing you want to do is lose face and apologize. So you've doubled down on it. We are not the loving and selfless beings we'd like to think we are. And I know this because of what happens to me and possibly every human on the planet, when you're placed on hold. And that music starts that soothing music designed to lower your blood pressure. And yet it rises. You know, if we were not the self absorbed people that we are. Maybe we wouldn't get so angry, maybe we would say Thank You, Lord. I've been praying for you to give me patience. And now you've given me an opportunity. And I can pray for this person who's just trying to do their job at the other end of the line that their life circumstances that put them in such a place where they this is the only job they can get. You know, they didn't wake up in third grade and say I want to work at a call center. But there they are. You might use that moment to say yes, I focused on the journey, not the destination. That's what everybody tells you you should do. It's about the journey, not the destination. Oh, but we're about the destination. I want to get my phone fixed. I want to get this warranty issue solved. And I want the contractor to come to my house and don't put me on hold. So Bob Dylan, in the 80s recorded a really amazing album called Oh mercy. And he I think underlined what Jesus is trying to get at here. It's what the Reformers called total depravity. But Bob Dylan said ain't no use chokan everything is broken. Not that everybody is totally depraved or totally broken. But there is not a single person on the planet drawing breadth who is not in some way. Bent, flawed, self focused, not filled with pure motives all the time.

Why does this matter? Why do I want you Why does Jesus want us to have this view of human beings? What a downer, right? I wish we were the kind of people that could read motivational posters and actually get motivated. And that's the thing if you don't agree with the reason I care about this is because if you don't agree with Jesus's understanding of humanity here, you will be like the New Yorker cartoon recently that showed a lifeguard sitting on the beach, in their lifeguard chair shouting in the direction of the ocean. Hey, you to stop drowning. If you think people are basically free, capable, strong rational beings. And they're in a difficult situation, all you need to do is tell them stop, stop doing the thing. You're doing the sub optimal actions and bad choices, just reverse course. And this is what many preachers do. But it's not just in the church. It's what we do to ourselves all the time. You have these little conversations, you know, these resolutions you make tomorrow, I will stop procrastinating, quit smoking, read that book, pay off my credit cards, have that difficult conversation. And all these sorts of statements, believe that you that you yourself or the person you're

talking to can actually do the thing. They don't acknowledge what Jesus says or by the way, what Paul says we're in that Romans reading, by the way talks about us being imprisoned in disobedience, first century language to tell you that you cannot fix yourself. You don't have the keys to unlock the cell that you're in. And the reason I want to disabuse you of this idea that you are strong, capable and able to do all the things is because if that's your idea, and maybe in some areas of life, you find that to be true, it's likely the result of genetics and a stable childhood home. But even if you do find yourself able to do those things, in some situations, I guarantee you, there's a place where those rules don't apply. You find yourself unable to fix yourself or the people around you. And if you don't get on the same page with Jesus that will lead you to despair, immense frustration and anxiety and a place of desolation. Because you won't understand yourself or the people around you. But if you get on the same page with Jesus here and see that out of the human heart comes all this stuff, and that applies to you and everybody you know, then you might be able to have some compassion. Now, I don't know, maybe not. But maybe you might be able to be compassionate to yourself, and to others, the way you can test this is when you find yourself getting really angry at someone. And it could be someone you live with, or it could be somebody on the side of the road. That lazy good for nothing, wanted to get their act together, I made good choices, or again, somebody in your household. And if you find yourself a try, try this out, tell yourself, that person is doing the best that they can. If you find yourself resistant to that idea, you're not quite here with Jesus in terms of how people actually operate in the world. And so what I want to say is if you can sit with what Christ says here about what people are like and what you are like, you might find that is it is transformative. And how you approach other people, how you approach yourself, and how you come to God. How do you approach God? Because you might find out that you begin to come to God as someone who doesn't just show up and say, I promise I'll do better, I promise I'll do better. I promise I'll do better. I can do it. I can do it. I can do it. The spiritual version of Charlie Brown, I will kick the football this time. You might come to God saying I don't think I can do it. And I need help. And this is why that story about the SyroPhoenician or Canaanite woman comes right after Jesus teaches this understanding of human beings. It's put there to show us the posture of one who comes to God in a place of total humility, and at the end of her rope. And that's what we are offered. And this is what church is for, by the way. Because we invite you to come forward and to kneel at this table where we find the We are not worthy as the Book of Common Prayer says on page 330 337. In a prayer based directly from this passage, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs from your table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. But you have to get down here to see that God's mercy and grace is actually for you. You have to connect to your weakness, which is what this whole liturgy is about here in this thing we call the Episcopal Church by the way to connect to where you actually live

your place of need to get you honest, in a world that would normally tell you to just live in denial and pretend like things are fine. But if you can get to the place of this Canaanite woman, even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table. You can get to that level of honesty about your need, you will find that God is the one who does always have mercy and actually invites you to a seat at the table. Let us pray. Almighty God we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs from the table but Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Amen.