

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 16, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Genesis 45:1-15; 2nd Reading: Matthew 15:10-28
Scripture for the Message: Isaiah 56: 1-8 “Kin-dom”

I want to talk about the goodness of God – the inclusive message in the scriptures we just read. God's divine inclusion and reconciliation in the KIN-DOM of God. So, I want to talk about the irreversible acceptance of God and the unity present in the Body of Christ.

Parts of Isaiah are written before, during, and after the time of exile. This particular passage most bible scholars believe comes after the exile to a community in transition. This presents a turning away from the way the Israelites lived both before and during the seventy years of exile. They considered themselves the “elect of God” but that was before. This passage gives them something to think about in that regard. Their tradition as “people of God” has its basis in pedigree and inheritance. If you don't come into that pedigree from generation to generation – then you weren't part of their tradition. God does not care about pedigree and now, foreigners and eunuchs, those unable to pass down that pedigree, God will not exclude, according to what the LORD says in this scripture.

When the prophet claims that “salvation is close at hand” so maintain justice and do what is right – not only is that a message to the people of Israel but it is a message for all. Blessed is the one who does what is right, the person who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it. The prophet continues to include what the people excluded prior to the exile, the foreigners and even eunuchs. These were the outcasts, the abominations, the unclean and unworthy. But God, through the prophet, says to those foreigners and eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, you too will be included, accepted, brought to the holy mountain, and given joy in the LORD's house of prayer.

The prophet gives us the words Jesus quoted when clearing the temple – “my house will be called a house of prayer” for all nations. I wonder if Jesus had this entire passage of Isaiah in mind when he drove out the money changers etc. from the temple. Not only were these money changers making the temple a “den of robbers” but they were also excluding from worship those who were foreigners and eunuchs – these money changers were occupying the spaces commonly reserved for those wanting to worship God but excluded from entering the temple

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 16, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

proper because of their “pedigree.” In effect, Jesus righteous anger wasn’t so much about what might be considered a misuse of the temple, but the abomination was the exclusion of the “others” from worshipping God.

I think verse eight in this scripture gives us the clearest sense of God’s purpose spoken through the prophet. “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.” What comes out very clear in this scripture is a message of inclusion – salvation is available to all not only to those who consider being part of the family of God as a birthright, or those who consider themselves members of the “elect of God.” This is about the goodness of God and the expansiveness of God’s grace extended to all – even the ones **we feel** don’t deserve it. God is big enough to include in the kin-dom those we, as humans, try to exclude. God blesses and makes space for all who come to God, all who “keep God’s Sabbaths.”

Listen to what the LORD says about the eunuchs who were prohibited from worship, most were considered less than human beings, they did not choose their condition but in most instances had it forced upon them by the powerful elite. “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.” And to the foreigners, who also were excluded from the community the LORD says: “Foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, who keep the Sabbath – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. . .”

To those who were not considered members of the beloved community, but who exhibit love and faithfulness to the LORD. God will include those people in the great banquet, they will be brought to God’s holy mountain to find joy. God says in very clear terms, “Don’t you dare exclude them from my house!”

This passage talks about those who are obedient and who keep the LORD’s sabbath. So, what does that really mean? Keeping the sabbath is a practice unique to the Israelites and was “THE” marker of commitment to YAHWEH in ancient Israel. Keeping the LORD’s sabbath was considered a true indication of being “covenant people.” It meant you were chosen.

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 16, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

Consequently, what might be our modern equivalent of keeping the sabbath? We generally consider the sabbath as a day of rest and worship. Sundays are what the church generally considers the Christian sabbath. Does it mean that if a person rests and worships on Sunday (or whatever their tradition considers a sabbath day) that person is a member of God's beloved community?

I wonder if there might be more to it than that. I wonder if "Keeping the Sabbath" might also mean obeying the commands of Christ. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **And** – Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." It certainly could mean caring for the least of these among us, loving the unlovable and offering grace and forgiveness to the outcasts and aliens among us. For those who do this, "Don't you dare exclude them from my house."

There are people who practice Sabbath keeping, they don't work on the Sabbath, they attend worship services and they think they are keeping the LORD's Sabbath holy. Some of these people don't however love their neighbors, they don't even love themselves very much. Some of these people try to select who God should include and who God should exclude. I don't think that is the message this scripture is trying to convey.

The message from the scripture we read last week stated, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved." This message very clearly includes the foreigner and the eunuch – classic examples of outcasts and abominations – in that promise. God declares to the people of Israel – "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." Which to me sounds like God's promise to include ALL – people of all nations, from all levels of society, even those who are different from us. All will gather on that Holy Mountain.

The connection between our scripture readings today, from Genesis, to Isaiah, and to Matthew is a thread of forgiveness, reconciliation, grace, and inclusion. It is a thread woven by loving obedience to God's Sabbath. You see, it really does matter how we live, it matters that we love God and our neighbors, it matters that we seek justice in this world, it matters that WE do not exclude those we believe are different and unworthy. It matters because this is God's work, remember from the message of weeds and wheat – we are not the reapers. We cannot limit God by deciding who is in and who is out.

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 16, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

In the story about Joseph, there were many opportunities for Joseph to remain bitter and resentful toward his brothers. There was no need for him to show mercy and compassion toward them when they came for food. Things had turned around for Joseph so he could claim “special status” and show his brothers the door. However, because of the loving way the LORD cared for Joseph, he was able to show that same love and compassion to his brothers in spite of the abominable way they treated him. He could have said to them, you are not worthy of my attention – but he saw them as they were, brothers.

In our reading from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus sets an example for us when he accepts the faith of the Canaanite woman. She was a social outcast, but Jesus saw her faith as valid – Jesus made her enough. Jesus was a devout Jew and considered association with gentiles to be unclean practice. Jesus however frequently associated with those the rest of the religious elite considered ‘unclean.’ His example begins when he ‘educates’ the disciples about what is clean and unclean or defiled. It is not what we put into our bodies that defile, it is what we put into our hearts and what comes out of our hearts that potentially defiles.

My heart aches for those who feel excluded, for those who don’t feel worthy because of something from their past or something others project on them. I read these words, I read Jesus’ words, and my heart aches for those who don’t see it, those who cannot grasp the far-reaching, never-ending, expansive love of God. God’s love is all inclusive – Jesus’ obedience to the cross was to restore all of humanity to a right relationship with God, which is our salvation. Jesus restores us and saves us from life without God’s presence, not because any one of us deserves it. Salvation is God’s work, Jesus’ gift to us.

I believe that when God looks at each of us, God sees the soul not our outward appearance. God does not consider our bodies; God considers our hearts. I wonder if God even cares whether we are male or female, gentile or jew, broken or whole – does God care about gender or race at all? God sees beyond what we, in our limited humanity, can see. Our perception of reality is limited to earth bound things – we know that God is bigger than that. You know I’ve said this before, when we try to tell God what is good or what is bad – maybe we ourselves are leaning more toward the bad than the good. God is God and we are not. “Don’t you dare exclude them from my house.”

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 16, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

The point is this – God will draw all nations to that Holy Mountain on “That Day” and this gathering will most likely include some that will surprise us. You can look at all humanity and realize that we are not that different from each other on the deepest level. “God said, “let us create humans in our own image,” and from the stardust of a wild and wonderful cosmic collision, we were born. And God said, “Ah, yes, we shall call them earthlings, because they are ALL made of the stars and hold the beauty of all creation within them.” And God looked upon creation and smiled. It was good.”¹

Creation, all of it is good – all of humanity is created in God's image, and God looks on us as good, very good. And through the prophets God says, “Don't you dare exclude them from my house.”

¹ Trimble, Cameron. *Searching for the Sacred: Sixty Meditations on Faith, Hope, & Love*. Chalice Press. 2022. p.23