SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — August 16, 2026

It's good to be at Emmaus after 25 years! If you've wondered what Pastor Paul has been doing, one thing I would say is that I've doubled-down on my preaching themes since I've left. I focus more than ever on the Gospel as the Good News of *Nonviolence* in this age threatened by so much violence. Today's readings give ample evidence once again.

St. Paul's Gospel of Nonviolence

- It begins at his conversion (which included a name change from Saul to Paul). Jesus confronts him on the road to Damascus not on the matter of his unbelief but of his violence: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4)
- From beginning to end of the Letter to the Romans (which we read over several months this summer): Paul is ringing out the Gospel of God's mercy to both Jew and Greek — to all people. In today's reading he says it in this bold way: "For God has shut up all in disobedience, that God might have mercy on all." (Rom 11:32)
- Several weeks ago, Paul said it this way: "We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good with those who love him, who are called according to God's purpose. Those whom God foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family." (Rom 8:28-29)
- God's purpose it to mend humanity's broken family back into one! This is what Emaus worked to live out here in this neighborhood with Spanish-speaking families and English-speaking families working together in Jesus' name.
- The current violence against Spanish-speaking people is one of the forces that worked against you. Are there still ways to live this mission of the oneness of God's large family in Jesus?

Matthew's Gospel of Nonviolence

- Matthew's is the Gospel in which Jesus straightforwardly teaches nonviolence right from the beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. It took a Hindu man, Mahatma Gandhi, to revive the centrality of this message and to turn it into a movement which continues to grow.
- But it also spurs violent resistance, both then and now. For Jesus, he responded by taking a different (nonviolent) tactic than teaching straightforwardly: he (in Matthew 13) begins to teach in parables — the Parables of the Sower, the Wheat and the Weeds, the Pearl of Great Value.
- But one thing we didn't read last month was why. We skipped where Jesus explains teaching in parables. (See Matt 13:13-15, 34-35, naming the resistance to understanding Jesus.)
- Many scholars believe that teaching in parables wasn't restricted to story in Matt 13. Over the next several chapters in Matthew (14-16), Jesus also uses **acted-out** parables, where Matthew's readers are given clues to Jesus performing a twist on familiar stories from Israel's past.

Acted-out Parables of Matthew 14 (the Gospel Readings the past two weeks)

- The miraculous feeding recalls in the Old Testament: manna in the Wilderness for the wandering children of Israel (Exodus 16), and Elijah saving the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17). God is shown to be able to miraculously provide food. But in Matthew's Gospel the devil tempts Jesus to show off his divine power by turning stones into bread. So when Jesus miraculously feeds people, could the miracle be of a different nature? Perhaps people had food with them but were afraid to share. In that climate, it's even likely. So Jesus modeled for them a thinking in terms of *abundance* which opened their hearts to *generous sharing*? Which is the more important miracle? God being able, on occasion, to miraculously provide food? Or human beings learning to be generous so that we might more continually share God's abundance with each other?
- Jesus walking on water recalls in the Old Testament: The people of Israel walking through the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and again crossing over the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Joshua 3). Sinking down into water also was a metaphor for suffering scapegoating violence in Psalm 69 (which Jesus quote in John 15:25). Is Jesus walking on the water a parable of what is to come, the scapegoating violence of the cross? Jesus will not sink under water to the extent that he

stands against the violence nonviolently. The disciples will sink down and run away. But Peter shows glimpses of what's ahead in the Book of Acts, when the apostles follow Jesus in no longer sinking down into the violence leveled against them, standing against it nonviolently.

The Acted-out Parables of Matthew 15 (featuring Jesus' encounter with a "Canaanite" woman)

- The background to Matthew 15 is Joshua's conquering of the Promised Land as commanded by God through the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 7:1-2:

  > When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you — the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the **Canaanites**, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, **seven** nations mightier and more numerous than you — and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

- Show them no mercy. Does God really command genocide? Tragically, many Christian peoples have used this passage to justify it. Are there those in Israel today who have this passage in mind in their aggression against the people of Gaza?
- Matthew's Gospel of nonviolence has a strategy to address a passage like this!
- It begins by understanding that Joshua son of Nun, who led the conquest of the "seven nations" and Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah *are the same name in Hebrew*: יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. How can this be? "Joshua" is the rendering of the name into English straight from the Hebrew. "Jesus" is the rendering of the same Hebrew name when it is first rendered into the Greek of the New Testament (Ἰησοῦς; *Iēsous*), and then rendered into English from the Greek.
- The next clue in this acted-out parable is that "Canaanite" is the main designation of the peoples of the "seven nations" whom Joshua of Nun conquered. In the stories from the Book of Joshua, sometimes the peoples of the "seven nations" of Deut 7 are simply called "Canaanite."
- But the designation "Canaanite" is also 'out of time' for people of the first century. Mark's Gospel, which Matthew had in front of him when he wrote, correctly calls this woman "Syro-Phoenician." Calling her a "Canaanite" is like calling a modern Norwegian person a "Viking." It's the wrong time period. So why does Matthew deliberately change her ethnic designation from "Syro-Phoenician" to "Canaanite"? It's to give us a parable about another Joshua — this one of the first century — who goes into "Canaanite" territory, lets himself be conquered in an engagement of words by a "Canaanite" woman, and then shows her mercy.
- The final clues to this acted-out parable are in the final 11 verses of Matthew 15. It's fuzzy as to where Jesus goes next — "along the Sea of Galilee," which we've already learned has a Jewish side and a gentile side — but he does his usual thing: healing all the sick and casting out demons. Then, Matthew comments about the people Jesus is healing that "they praised the God of Israel" (Matt 15:31). Why would Matthew say "God of Israel" if they simply shared the same God as the Jews? Isn't this a clue that Jesus is continuing to show mercy to *gentile* peoples?
- This is answered by the final story of Matthew 15: a *second* miraculous feeding of a crowd, this time four thousand. The other difference in numbers is the prominence of the number *seven*. Instead of five loaves of bread to begin with, we get *seven*. And instead of twelve baskets left over, we get *seven* baskets leftover. The number *twelve* is representative of the number of tribes of Israel, a number Jesus chooses to elevate when he chooses disciples. Isn't it safe to assume that the number *seven* in this story also is representative of something? The "seven nations" which Joshua had conquered many centuries ago, showing no mercy. This latter day "Joshua," Jesus the Messiah, went to those same peoples and did nothing but show them mercy.

Here's Pastor Paul's take on our task of reading the Bible: to read it as the centuries long true story of how the true Creator God covenanted with the people of Israel for a long, slow revealing of God's true self as Love — as completely nonviolent and merciful — a revelation that only comes to fullness in Jesus (Joshua) the Messiah. We urgently need to recapture the fullness of this revelation to meet the violence of our time and then to take up the mission of healing God's one large human family. What will be next for Emaus as you seek to live as God's family in this neighborhood?