

“Favoritism” September 9, 2018, 16th Sunday after Pentecost James 2:1-12, Mark 7:24-37

Sermon Text: Mark 7, NIV

26b She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

Favoritism is the act of offering "good will, kind regard" and kindness based on "bias or partiality." It is preferential treatment based on “affinity,” like attributes of beauty, culture, education and caste. Favoritism is bias for those we deem acceptable or desirable and against those we do not. Favoritism limits the scope of God’s mission to our own little increasingly shrinking and narrowing clique.

James 2:1-12

1 My brothers and sisters ... 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

In 1787, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were class leaders at St. George Methodist Episcopal

Church in Philadelphia. This property which exists today, more as a museum than a church, had been a Dutch Reformed Church (the oldest Protestant body in America) and was purchased in 1769.

The African members under Allen and Jones' direction constructed a fine gallery. The African members were to sit in the gallery so as not to inconvenience the Western European Americans in the ground floor.

But this particular Sunday, they were dedicating the newly renovated building. The Africans sat in the gallery, which had steps built so that during prayers and holy communion they could have access to the altar table without having to go through the first level and upset their alleged sister and brothers. But when the prayers began, two trustees had walked up to the gallery and demanded that Allen and Jones and their African members move to the rear of the gallery, out of the sight of the dignitaries in

attendance. Allen protested, "Let us finish our prayers." After no small amount of scuffle the Africans as a group rose up from their knees and walked out. Richard Allen stated, "They were no more troubled by us and our brethren."

Allen and Jones and the band of Africans first met in the Quaker Meeting House where in that same year, 1787, they founded the Free African Society.

Richard Allen, who would become the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and those who wanted to remain Methodists, left the St.

Thomas Episcopal church founded in the Meeting House and organized the Bethel African Methodist Society in 1791, meeting in Allen's blacksmith shop.

Bishop Asbury kept trying to send elders to give communion and perform baptisms, but many of these men, even though they demanded payment, often selectively served holy communion to those

Africans that they believed to be “the good ones worthy of communion.”

After protests to Bishop Asbury, Richard Allen was ordained in 1799 as the first African American clergy in the Methodist movement. Because of increasing favoritism based on race by white churches, Bethel joined with several other Black Methodist societies and in 1816 Allen organized the First General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.

The five million descendants of those Africans remain separated from the United Methodist Church to this day. All of this occurred in a so-called holiness movement that was beset by racial favoritism.

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

Dr. James Hal Cone, “The Bill & Judith Moyers

Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology” at

Union Theological Seminary, in New York, who passed away on the 28th of April this year, published in 1975, “God of the Oppressed.”

Dr. Cone built his contention upon this passage in the Book of James 2:5, “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world.” While the church has shown favoritism towards the rich, the white, the educated, the captains of industry, God has chosen the poor. God has shown favoritism towards those that the church refuses to show favoritism to.

This favoritism of God is intense, because James prophesies that God has chosen them to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him. God chooses those who are marginalized by the majority in society. The only elect that James, the brother of Jesus Christ knows of, is the poor in the eyes of the world, the rich in faith.

6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ... 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are a lawbreaker.

The woman who confronted Jesus was of Canaanite descent, a native of the Phoenician seaboard of Northeast Egypt. This North African coastal district between Tyre and Sidon was called Syrophenicia (the same Egyptian area known today as Gaza) to distinguish it from Lybophoenicia or (Libya). She was an Egyptian living in a territory claimed by Syria, just as the Palestinian state that calls itself Israel now claims Egypt's Gaza as Israeli territory. Suffice it to say Jesus initially refused to show her God's favor because she was not a Jew. She was a dog in comparison to his people. He was here for God's favorites, not this Gentile dog. She pushed back, Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

Why did Jesus commend her faith? Why did he heal her daughter? Because in the face of the ideology of

Jewish Supremacy that she was confronted with, she nevertheless maintained her self-worth, “Before God, even a dog is worthy of grace. She said to Jesus, “Well Black Lives Matter, Too.” God’s favor is not based on our collective history or experience. It is not based on caste, ethnicity or social class. God’s favor is there for whosoever will, and God has favored the despised of this world, but who he has given the gift to be rich in faith. Amen.