

August 16, 2026 — Sermon

Scripture Reading: Psalm 133:1–3

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15:21–28

“Blessing Beyond Boundaries”

Last Friday, one of our Clear Lake church members invited me to visit the Clear Lake Historical Museum. I learned many interesting things about the history of this area. I learned about Burleigh Grimes, a Hall of Fame baseball player who was born in Emerald, and about Gaylord Nelson, the former Wisconsin governor and US senator who founded Earth Day. But among all the historical items, what caught my attention most was a military uniform from the Korean War. I was born and raised in South Korea. But here in Wisconsin, I was looking at the uniform of an American soldier who had crossed the Pacific Ocean and gone to Korea many decades ago. Perhaps before going to Korea, that soldier had never met a Korean person. Korea may have been just a distant country on the other side of the world. But decades ago, he crossed an ocean and went to Korea. And decades later, someone from Korea crossed the same ocean in the other direction and is now standing here in Wisconsin, looking at his story. It made me think about boundaries.

We divide our world with many boundaries. This country and that country. Us and them. People we like and people we dislike. Places where we belong and places where we do not belong. Of course, boundaries are real. But sometimes we discover that those boundaries cannot separate us as completely as we imagine.

Today's Scripture is also about boundaries. Psalm 133 begins: “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” Then the psalmist gives us two beautiful images. The first is oil. The oil is poured on Aaron's head, but it does not stay there. It runs from his head, to his beard, and down to his robe. The oil flows. The second image is dew. The psalm says: “It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.” Mount Hermon is in the north, and Zion is far to the south. They are distant from each other. But the psalm imagines the dew of Hermon reaching all the way to Zion. Again, the blessing moves. The oil flows. The dew flows. And the psalm ends: “For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.” God's blessing does not stay in one place. God's blessing flows.

And in Matthew's Gospel, we see how far that blessing can flow. Jesus travels to the region of Tyre and Sidon, outside the land of Israel. And there he meets a woman. Matthew does not simply call her “a woman.” He calls her a Canaanite woman. That

name itself marks a boundary. Israel and Canaan. Inside and outside. Us and them. The woman cries out: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus does not answer her at first. The disciples want her sent away. Then Jesus says: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she does not leave. She comes to Jesus and says: "Lord, help me." Then Jesus says: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." There is a clear boundary in this image. Children. Dogs. Bread. Table.

At first, the logic seems to be: the children come first, so the dogs are left out. But the woman answers: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She does not reject Jesus' image. She uses the same image—children, dogs, bread, and table—but changes its possibility. Children first, yes. But that does not mean the dogs must be excluded. The children can eat, and the dogs can still receive the crumbs. She is not asking that anything be taken away from the children. She simply sees that there is enough at the table. The blessing of one does not require the exclusion of another. Grace is not scarce. If someone else receives grace, that does not mean there is less grace for me. If someone else is welcomed, I do not lose my place at the table.

And Psalm 133 comes back to us. The oil does not stop on Aaron's head. The dew does not remain on Hermon. And now even the crumbs fall beyond the edge of the table. God's blessing keeps moving beyond the place where we expected it to stop. Jesus finally says: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter is healed. The boundary was real. But the boundary could not contain the grace of God.

This reminds me of another story Jesus told. A lawyer once asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" Think about that question. It is really a question about boundaries. Who is inside? Who is outside? How far does my responsibility go? Because when I define who my neighbor is, I also create a category of people who are not my neighbors. But after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus changes the question. He asks: "Which of these three was a neighbor?" The lawyer asks: "Who is my neighbor?" But Jesus asks: "Will you become a neighbor?" Jesus does not help him draw a clearer boundary. Jesus teaches him to cross one. And there is one more interesting connection. The story of the Good Samaritan begins with the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Psalm 133 ends with: "life forevermore." Life is found where God's blessing and love refuse to stop at the boundaries we draw.

And that brings me back to that US military uniform from the Korean War. We ask, "Who is my neighbor?" Sometimes, our neighbor may be across a border, someone we have never met before. But when we cross that boundary, we discover how deeply our lives can be connected. And perhaps God is asking us today: Where is

your neighbor waiting for grace? Just as the oil flowed from Aaron's head to his beard, and from his beard to his robe; just as the dew reached from Hermon to Zion, and grace crossed from Israel to Canaan, and from Jew to Samaritan, God's grace flows through us to our neighbors. Grace flows. And where God's blessing flows, there is life. Amen.

Let us pray. Loving God, thank you for your wondrous grace. We have not earned it; it is a gift from you. We acknowledge that all we have and all we are able to do come from you, for you are the source of our strength. Remove our arrogance and greed, so that we may open our arms and extend your hospitality to our neighbors. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.