Something happened on the way to the Robert E Lee statue in Charlottesville last week. It ceased really being about the statue. In fact, as you may know, the Charlottesville city council had already voted to remove that century-old statue of Lee mounted atop his horse, Traveller, in a city park. General Lee himself would have agreed with this decision, having written after the war, “I think it wiser not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavoured to obliterate the marks of civil strife and to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered.”

Instead, the statue was used as a rallying point for those who believe that one type of blood – Caucasian – is superior to the blood of any other peoples; that one race should dominate another. The statue was used as a rallying point for hatred – for evil.

Evil, as expressed through racism, unfortunately, is not new. Most of us remember Biblical stories about Jewish/Samaritan relationships in which Jews believed Samaritans were inferior and detestable because they believed their worship of God (the same God, by the way) was “less than pure” and that their blood (Israelite blood mixed with that of non-Jewish people) was less than pure.

Today we read a Gospel passage about a Canaanite woman, seeking healing for her daughter through Jesus.

Perhaps we remember from our Bible history that the Israelites and Canaanites had been enemies. Israel had conquered the land of Canaan militarily, but also culturally. The Israelite, or later Jewish culture, became more dominate than Canaan culture in at least some parts of the ancient world, just as white or Caucasian culture has become the dominant culture in most of the United States.

When Jesus is first approached by the Canaanite woman, he resists, saying his calling is to the Israelites, using a comparison between dogs and children. But the woman persists, saying that even a dog receives crumbs from the master’s table. These references to dogs perhaps make some of us cringe, especially as it seems to designate one race (the dominant one) as God’s children and the others as dogs. I invite us to remember the context – up to this point Jesus has been meeting the spiritual needs of the Jews – feeding 5,000 of them with a few loaves and fishes. While meeting with some acceptance, he’s also encountered rejection, especially from Jewish leaders. As Jesus turns his ministry away from those who rejected him – Jewish leadership – and toward those who accept him, he includes Gentiles who seek him. Within that context, the verse is best understood allegorically, not literally. Jesus is giving to the Gentiles that which some Jews considered crumbs. The Table is the Scripture, which will be fulfilled through Christ’s Passion and Resurrection. These verses present to us a picture of a post-Easter world – a post-Resurrection world – the world brought about through Christ’s fulfillment of Scripture. In that world, every race is part of Christ’s plan – every person who seeks God in faith will be fed. The daughters and sons of every nation will be healed.

This passage speaks to us – followers of Christ – who are tasked with helping to bring about this world on earth – in the aftermath of Charlottesville and scenes like it throughout the world. Because every race is part of God’s plan and all people receive the revelation of Christ, then we as Christians are to express that revelation – that Jesus loved all of us so much that He shed His blood for us. That love does not condone hatred or bigotry or language or action which divides people and which implies that one race is better or more deserving than another. Not only are we not to condone this behavior, we are called to work against societal or individual actions that divide or that make assumptions about people based on race.

On Facebook this week, appeared an insightful comment, source unknown, that some of us saw and shared. It said the following

 You know what worries me? It's not that a group of racist idiots lit some tiki torches and decided to have a rally. I worry that on Monday they'll go back to their job in human resources and decide who gets hired and who gets fired. They'll put their uniform back on and "serve and protect." They'll sit on a jury and decide the fate of a young person of color. They'll teach in a kindergarten class. They'll sit across from a couple, who came to this country, worked hard and saved, and have the power to approve or deny them a loan to purchase their first home. They'll decide an insurance claim. They'll give an estimate to repair the brakes on a mother's only mode of transportation to get to work each day.
I don't stay up lamenting the fact that racists feel emboldened to parade in the street. I stay up because racists have, do, and will apply their racist beliefs in their daily lives and, by extension mine, and they don't do it carrying a banner to distinguish themselves.
It isn't the theatrical that worries me. It's the practical.

In living out the Gospel of Christ, sometimes we are called to the practical. We are called to do all we can to protect the dignity of all people, to assure that all have equal access to God’s blessings and to promote unity and healing in places of division and sickness and evil. We are called to look at our own hearts to be sure we don’t make presumptions about a person’s character based on their race. We are called to seek societal changes that ensure that each individual has access to the blessings God offers. We are called to respect and to call society to respect the dignity of every human being.

Because in the end, white blood isn’t really any different or better than the blood of our brothers and sisters of color. Jesus’s blood is the blood that matters and it makes us all equal and unites us all to one another. Discipleship is not just about symbols. It’s about how much love is in our hearts and how we express that love in all our occupations of life. It’s about us as Resurrection people living into the vision of bringing healing to everyone, sowing peace where there are seeds of hatred.

Amen