

Not My Problem

Proper 15A — Track II

Isaiah 56:1, 6–8 • Psalm 67 • Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32 • Matthew 15:(10–20), 21–28

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I. Not My Problem

Have you ever had a computer problem...

You call tech support...

“Sir, I’m showing your unit is a... GX-4400 Series Quantum Node...”

“This isn’t a computer issue... this is a modem issue...”

So you call the modem company...

“Ma’am, that’s a... Trident-7 Dual-Band Mesh Relay...”

“This isn’t a modem issue... this is a router issue...”

So you call the router people...

“I see here... you’re running a... Vortex XL-900 Adaptive Gateway...”

“This isn’t on us... this is your internet provider...”

So you call your internet provider...

Forty-five minutes on hold...

A very calm voice tells you...

“Our system shows... a Helios-Bravo Nine Fiber Node...”

“This appears to be... a satellite issue...”

[beat]

A satellite...

You didn't know you owned a satellite...

Apparently... somewhere above your house...

There is a satellite...

And its name...

Is longer than your own...

[pause]

So — naturally — you try to call the satellite...

Nobody answers...

Because it turns out...

The satellite... has its own customer service number...

Which is also on hold...

Which also transfers you...

Back... to tech support...

Where a voice says...

“I show your unit is... a GX-4400 Series Quantum Node...”

[beat]

Forty-five minutes... four departments... one satellite...

Four impossible names...

And still... not... one... person...

Who will say...

“That's my problem... let me fix it...”

[beat]

We laugh...

Because we know exactly... what that feels like...

Somebody... somewhere... always says... “not my problem”...

Even when... it is...

[pause]

And here’s the thing...

You can only hit so many walls...

Before you break...

[beat]

And when we break...

We do what we always do...

We pray...

“God... please... just fix it...”

[pause]

Wouldn’t that be nice...

God... reaches down...

Waves a hand...

And the problem... disappears...

[beat]

That would be nice...

But that is not... how God works...

And this is not... a new problem...

This is a very old... problem...

[pause]

Long before tech support...

Long before satellites...

People... had a system...

It was called... The Law...

[beat]

And the law was... specific...

Six hundred and thirteen commandments...

Not six-thirteen ideas...

Six-thirteen... rules...

What you could eat...

What you could wear...

How far... you could walk... on a Saturday...

[beat]

And people... added to it...

Because that's what people do...

They found loopholes...

So they built more rules...

To close the loopholes...

Which created... new loopholes...

Which needed... more rules...

[beat]

Until you had a system...
So complicated...
So specific...
So impossible...
That it would make... tech support...
Look Easy...

[pause]

“Sir, I’m sorry... you’re outside the covenant...”
“Ma’am, that’s not a purity issue... that’s a sacrifice issue...”
“This isn’t my department... you’ll need to see a priest...”
“Which priest?”
“That depends... which model of sin... are we discussing...”

[beat]

Six hundred and thirteen ways...
To be told...
Not... my problem...

III. Not My Problem Too?

But here’s a question worth sitting with...
The law... was given to Israel...
Not to Canaanites...
Not to Jebusites...
Not to Amorites...
So... were they... not my problem too?

[beat]

Imagine calling tech support... about that one...

“Sir, I’m showing you’re a... Jebusite...”

“I’m sorry... that’s outside our coverage area...”

“Have you tried... the Amorite department?”

“Ma’am, our records show... you’re a Canaanite...”

“That account... was never opened...”

“You’ll need to speak... to Abraham’s descendants...”

“They handle... that region...”

[beat]

Funny...

Until you remember...

It’s not a joke...

It’s a real question...

[pause]

Because somewhere along the way...

It got easy...

To confuse two very different sentences...

“You are not... in the covenant”...

And...

“You are not... made in the image of God”...

[beat]

Those are not... the same sentence...

One is a legal status...

The other... is Genesis, chapter one...

“Let us make humankind... in our image”...

It doesn't say... Israel's image...

It says... humankind...

[pause]

Every nation on that land...

Every name we forget how to pronounce...

Canaanite... Jebusite... Amorite...

Every single one...

Carried the image of God...

Whether the law... covered them... or not...

IV. She Already Knew

[beat]

So when this woman...

This Canaanite woman...

Came to Jesus...

She already knew...

She wasn't covered...

She wasn't confused about that...

She knew the law...

And the law... dis **not** have her name in it...

[pause]

And Jesus... tells her the truth...

“I was sent... only to the lost sheep of Israel”...

That's not *cruelty*...

That's... *accuracy*...

He's *not lying* to her...

He's telling her... *exactly what the system says*...

[beat]

And the *disciples*... *needed to hear it*

Needed to hear it...

[pause]

Because they were about to go... into lands... just like this one...

Samaria... Antioch... The ends of the earth...

[beat]

And every single time...

They'd meet *someone*... The law never covered...

Someone *outside* the sheepfold...

Outside the *covenant*...

Outside... *the six hundred and thirteen*...

[pause]

If Jesus... just quietly healed her...
Not a single word spoken...
No boundary named...
The *disciples... might have missed it...*
They might have thought...
This is the exception...
This one woman... this one time...

[beat]

But Jesus... *names the boundary... out loud...*
So they can watch... What happens... next...

[pause]

So they can *watch...*
The *boundary...*
Get *crossed... on purpose...*
In front of witnesses...
By a woman... who refuses to leave...

V. The Crumbs

[pause]

Now rewind back six hundred years... before *that moment...*
Isaiah already knew...
The *system... was never the last word...*

[pause]

“The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord...”

“I will bring... to my holy mountain...”

“My house shall be called...”

“A house of prayer...”

“For all peoples”...

[beat]

Not... ***some*** peoples...

Not... the ***covered*** peoples...

All... peoples...

[pause]

Isaiah said it first...

This woman... is just... ***holding Jesus to it...***

[beat]

So she stays... She kneels... And she says...

“Lord, help me”...

[pause]

And Jesus... ***tests the boundary again...***

“It is not fair... to take the children’s bread...”

“And throw it... to the dogs”...

[beat]

That word... lands hard...

It should...

We don’t get to soften it...

[pause]

But watch... what she does...

She doesn't argue... the boundary...

She doesn't say... "don't call me that"...

She doesn't say... "I deserve better"...

[beat]

She says...

"Yes, Lord"...

"Yet even the dogs..."

"Eat the crumbs..."

"That fall... from their masters' table"...

[pause]

She agrees... to the boundary...

And asks... for what falls... outside it...

[beat]

She's not asking Jesus... to break the law...

She's not asking... for a seat at the table...

She's asking... for the crumbs...

The part... that was always going to fall...

Whether anyone... caught it... or not...

[pause]

And Jesus...

Stops...

[beat]

“Woman... great is your faith”...

“Let it be done... for you... as you wish”...

[pause]

Not... “let it be done because you argued well”...

Not... “let it be done because you deserved it”...

“Let it be done... as you wish”...

Because of your faith...

VI. The Gong

I want to tell you...

what great faith... actually Looks like...

Because I’ve seen it...

[beat]

Years ago... at another church...

I was locking up... on a Sunday afternoon...

And a man approached me...

“Can I look inside?”

[pause]

I asked him why...

And he told me...

This was where he found God...

[beat]

He wasn't a member...

He didn't attend...

He was just a boy... in a Cub Scout pack...

That met... on the property once week...

[pause]

While the other scouts... ran around outside...

Playing games...

Something... drew him... to the little white church...

So... he slipped away from the other kids...

And... Slipped in... the back door...

[beat]

Some of the ladies were inside...

Altar guild... flower guild...

He doesn't remember which...

And they didn't ask him... why he was there...

They didn't ask... if he was a member...

They just... let him look around...

[pause]

He walked up toward the altar...

And he saw it...

The gong...

Brass... more than a foot wide...

With a mallet...

[beat]

And of course...

Being a curious kid... He hit it...

Bong... bong... BONG...

[beat]

(That gong... does not know the meaning of quiet)

It only has one volume. LOUD

[beat]

The ladies just smiled...

And watched him ring it...

[beat]

After a while... he asked them...

“What else do you do here?”

And they told him... *They prayed...*

And they taught him... *How to pray...*

[pause]

He told me that day we met...

That something came over him... in that moment...

That set the course... of his entire life...

He's spent it... serving people...

Because of a gong...

And some ladies... who didn't ask... if he belonged...

[beat]

He asked me... ***Do you still have it?***

Yes... would you like want to ring it again?

Enthusiastic nodding

As we got closer... he pointed... ***THERE IT IS!***

I held out the mallet like a sacred element...

he carefully plucked it from my hand and carefully lowered himself to the floor.

Bong... Bong... Bong...

He was grinning so hard I thought... his face... might break...

Just the two of us...

In an empty church...

On a Sunday afternoon...

Celebrating... God's love... With gusto!

VII. Who's at the Back Door

I tell you that story...

Because I want you... to ask yourself something...

Who... is standing... at the back door... Right now...

Who is out there...

Playing the games... everyone else says matter...

While something... is pulling them... toward this place...

[beat]

And they don't think... they belong...

They're not a member...

They don't know the language...

They don't know... which fork to use...

Which hymn to stand for...

[pause]

They just know...

Something... is here...

[beat]

The question is...

When they slip in... the back door...

What will they find?

[pause]

Will they find... people who ask...

"Why are you here"...

[beat]

Or will they find...

Ladies who smile...

And hand them the mallet...

[pause]

Because that Canaanite woman...

Didn't need Jesus... to change the rules...

She needed... one person...

Willing to look past them...

[beat]

And that young cub scout...

Didn't need a sermon...

He needed... a gong...

And someone... who *wouldn't ask*... if he belonged...

[pause]

So look around you...

Right now...

[beat]

Somebody... in this room...

Was that boy once...

[pause]

Somebody... in this room...

Is still... at the back door...

Not sure... if they're allowed... inside...

[beat]

Not... my problem...

Is not... an option...

Not here... Not for us...

Because we... Of all people...

Know exactly what it feels like...

To be told... you're not one of us.

You're not welcome here

You're an outsider...

We know what it feels like...

To be called... something you're not...

[pause]

So when someone... slips in... our back door...

Looking... for God...

[beat]

We don't ask...

Why are you here...

[pause]

We hand them... the mallet...

VIII. A House of Prayer for All Peoples

[pause]

Because that boy...

Didn't just learn... to ring a gong...

He asked... "What else do you do here?"

And they told him... *We pray...*

And they taught him... *how...*

[pause]

Nobody checked... to see if he was a member...

Nobody asked... if he belonged... Before they taught...

a young Scout... How to talk... to God...

[beat]

That little wooden church... Never once... called itself...
A house of prayer... for all people...

It didn't need to... It just... was one...

That's what Isaiah promised...
Centuries before... Any of this happened...

*My house shall be called... A house of prayer...
For all people...*

Not... just for members... Not... just for the covered...
Not... just for the ones who know which fork to use...
For... all... people...

A Canaanite woman... found that promise...
Kneeling... in the dust... Asking for crumbs...

A Cub Scout... found that promise...
Kneeling next to a brass gong...
Asking what else... this place... was for...
Neither one of them... Read Isaiah first...

They just found... People who let them in...
And prayed with them... Until the promise... Became true...
Right in front of them... AMEN