



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, *Rector***

**The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
16 August, 2026**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Consider for a moment your formation. How much effort has gone into you and has come out of you to become the person that you are. You spent some 15 or so years of your life perfecting the physical skills of human life. You had to learn to stand, to walk, to run, to manipulate with fine dexterity, everything from a fork, probably started with a spoon, right? To a pencil, to perhaps a typewriter or a keyboard. If you went into something athletic, you learned in that period of time how to throw a ball, how to kick a ball, how to swing a club or a hockey stick or a racket.

You learned all the physical skills that would propel you into your adulthood. And as you learned a particular profession, you fine-tuned those skills that you had largely perfected in your earlier years. The same is true for you intellectually. We spend as a human species roughly 20 years learning the skills of our adulthood, the rudimentary elements of communication to its perfection in our early teens. The necessary skills of arithmetic and mathematics, perhaps foreign languages and the fundamentals of physics that govern our life in order that we can then master some particular skill as an engineer, a scientist, a teacher, a musician, an educator, doctor, whatnot. And if you've gone into some specialty like that, you've spent maybe 25 years of your life mastering that intellectual capacity that you will use for the rest of your life. But somewhere in our mid - 20s, for the most part, education stops.

It doesn't truly end, but you get my meaning.

And yet neither of those is at the center of our human interactions. Human society, human relationship, as intimate as our friendship, as our community, our community of Gross Point, Metro Detroit, the United States, et cetera, is governed not by intellect or physical movement, but by the movement of our hearts towards one another or away from one another. It's our heart that governs our relationships on a personal level and on a societal level. Who will we love? How will we love? That begins here, not here. Not here. The mind and the hands then come into action to affect that love, to perfect that love, to expand that love. But the love itself begins here, always here. And so Jesus notes



that it's not what goes into a person that defiles. It's what comes out of the human heart that defiles. So I ask you, how much time have you spent forming your heart?

Because that is the thing that governs society. That is the thing that governs your marriage. That is the thing that governs your household. What have you done? What are you doing to form the human heart? I would contend four years isn't enough. The human heart takes a lifetime of formation and reformation to come to soften, so open our hearts as to live with the generosity and love of Christ. What's so brilliant about this exchange that we've heard in this passage, the kind of mashup of a parable and an encounter is what is happening within Jesus himself? Jesus has been taught that he is there for the sheep of Israel. He is there for his people. And so he has lived that way. And suddenly at the age of 33, well past the formation years, he's encountering a woman from tire inside on, a Canaanite woman who is not part of Israel.

And she is challenging his heart. Does your heart have the capacity to love me? To love my daughter? And at first Jesus says, no, I'm not here for you. I'm here for this community. You have your community. I'm here for mine. And she reminds him that even people with dogs have a more expansive heart than that. Who hears a pet lover? There are lots. Okay. Who here is the dog lover? Okay. Who here's a cat lover? You guys are all mixed up. This is very odd. But you have the capacity to love your cat and your dog.

Give them little nibbles of food. I ought to tell you a little aside, Phyllis and Jim from Bethesda by the sea, they had a strict rule. They had this lovely little mini poodle. And that poodle was allowed no scraps from the table. I mean, they were rigid. And Jim came over to dinner at our house and here's what I see him doing. Cutting his steak. We're eating dinner. We have a dog, Maggie. Same rule in our household at the time. And here's Jim. All through dinner, quietly feeding our dog. We have this capacity to love our dog, she says. Can you love me with that little bit of love as well?

And Jesus' heart begins to expand to realize that the love that he has within him isn't just meant for the children of his house. It's meant for the world. In the same way that we naturally love our donkeys, our cats, or whatever pets are a part of our life. We are called just fundamentally to love. And so Jesus says that your faith is great. And her daughter is healed. Our responsibility as Christians isn't to get it right. It's to keep growing so that our heart softens and our love expands. Our minds and our hands will figure out what to do in those moments, but our heart needs to constantly be growing, be reshaped and reformed so that it may ever grow into the very heart of Christ.

I'm not saying you have to go and join a monastery or a convent. You don't have to spend every day of your life entrenched in scripture. It's not what Jesus is arguing. It's certainly not what I'm arguing.



It's not what I do. But we do have to be attentive to the heart within us. This time that we have is about your heart. We're going to come around this table in just a little bit in order that our hearts may confront the heart of Christ again and again and again. Perhaps the heart of Christ is reminding you of your belovedness.

And perhaps your heart needs to soften and expand for you alone. No doubt there are some amongst us who need to learn or hear again how beloved you are. And if you hear that today and nothing else, amen. But you're going to be kneeling or standing today, figuratively kneeling besides someone else. Someone who looks different, thinks differently, was raised in a different part of the world, New York perhaps, that comes with a different heart, a different set of needs, who is a Canaanite woman to you. And she will reach out her hands and receive the same bread and drink from the same cup as you. To hear and to know again that she is as beloved as you. To realize that our hearts need to have the same appreciation for the person beside us. The same capacity to love as God has to love her or him who is beside you in order that our hearts may expand and our love may extend.

We need our minds to be formed. We need our hands to be formed. Even more, we need our hearts to be formed into the image and love of God. Amen.