

# The Universality of God's Salvation

Fessahaye Mebrahtu

In today's readings, we observe that God's mercy and love extended beyond the traditional boundaries of the people of Israel. During the time of Jesus, the boundary had shrank to only Judea as Samaria was already in the exclusion list. Galilee, where Jesus grew up was on the periphery as well. We notice in the Gospels that Jesus often went into the territories traditionally excluded, for example, traversing through Samaria back and forth to Nazareth and Jerusalem. During these journeys of back and forth, Jesus encounters individuals and communities, preaching to them the good news.

The Hebrew Scriptures remind the people of Israel that their God is a universal God, who cares about all people within and without the chosen people. The Israelites often behaved as if they have a monopoly of God, forgetting their role was to be a source of blessing for the nations. However, often they behaved as gatekeepers of God's blessings, trying to analyze who deserves and who is not. On many numerous occasions, Jesus clashed with the gatekeepers, namely, the Pharisees and the priests, who so many types of obstacles for the average person to be closer to God.

Scripture scholars tell us that the Book of Jonah was written to underscore the universality of God and his benevolent mercy. Jonah's resistance to go to Nineveh was because he saw the people of Nineveh outside of the chosen people, therefore not worth of his time and preaching. Therefore, Jonah preferred to go contrary to God's directives. Once he was compelled to go to Nineveh, he was surprised for their receptiveness to his message and on God's mercy on them.

The first reading from Prophet Isaiah makes it clear that no one is outside God's care. "The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to him, loving the name of the Lord, and becoming his servants" (Isaiah 56: 6). The prophet expands the circle saying, "Others will I gather to him besides those already gathered" (Isaiah 56:8). No human person is outside God's blessing and invitation to salvation. The Responsorial Psalm reiterates God's fairness and love saying, "Because you rule the peoples with equity." In the Gospel of Mark Jesus commissions his disciples, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." Jesus saying, "Every creature" reminds us to be good stewards of God's creation too.

The second reading from the letter of St. Paul the Romans reminds us that God plan is to reconcile all people to him. It is an open invitation to all starting with the chosen people of Israel but not exclusively. Paul had to wrestle with his fellow disciples preaching the gospel to Gentiles. The disciples, including St. Peter were acting as gatekeepers, advocating for observing Judaic rules before welcoming the Gentile to the new faith. Peter was resistant until he saw a vision, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Act 10: 9-16). In the Gospel, Jesus is also confronted with similar dilemma. A Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter. Whether Jesus was constrained by his cultural upbringing or trying to send a message he seemed to resist to extend his power of healing to this outsider. However, her deep faith compelled him to heal her daughter saying, "O woman, treat is your faith!" In God's eyes, it is our faith and the sincerity of heart that matters not our social status, ethnicity, race, or any conventional attributes we give each other as means of inclusion and exclusion.