

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

Unclean God, braving defilement, inviting offence; you share your bread with vermin and outsiders; you let the Gentile woman subvert your plans: give us the faith that comes from the heart and walks beyond our boundary lines that we might be surprised by outrageous grace; through Jesus Christ, son of David and light of the world.

A Collect for Proper 15A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
 Proper 15A: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67; Matthew 15:10-28
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ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY
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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 15:10-28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Jesus left Gennesaret and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly

Have you ever wanted to do | something new and bold and found

yourself getting dragged back – by circumstances or habits of the mind – into old behaviors, old pain, old patterns?

This gospel reading starts by telling us of Jesus “singing a new song” – as in Psalm 96 – and offers a compelling vision of a new way – a way of the heart. He speaks of a radical vision away from empty religion, superficial rituals that have lost their meaning (in this case, certain dietary laws and religious customs around eating).

In the place of those restrictive customs, he calls for a life-giving, liberating reorientation of the heart – both awakening to the destructive potential of the immature and unexamined mind and, by implication, coming alive to the gift of a heart aroused to express one’s true, God-given self.

Good stuff. And radical. A new song – a new way to live in the world.

You would think Jesus would have just called it a day – and maybe he should have.

But, as we heard, he continued on his way – and don’t our journeys through life bring revelation to us, wake us up both in ways we may hope and in ways that surprise, sometimes shock us?

Jesus enters the district of Tyre and Sidon and, out of the blue, is accosted by a Canaanite woman, a foreigner, not one of his people,

not one of the Jewish people to whom he understood he had been called.

She wants Jesus to help her daughter who is struggling with an unknown malady – so, as was customary, she said she was “tormented by a demon.”

The Canaanite woman knew Jesus was both healing and “casting out demons” – helping people in ways he had special gifts to do. Also, he was coloring outside the lines – doing things in a new way.

So, no doubt, she was shocked, as we may have been, to see Jesus ignoring her, the disciples wanting to send her away, Jesus constrained by his culture and the habits of his mind that said she was of no concern to him.

So after the radical word at the beginning of this gospel reading, Jesus went back to acting in the old way towards the Canaanite woman.

The way forward, the revelation of life, of a new song, a new pathway for Jesus lay in the life and vision of the Canaanite woman.

She had *come* to the visionary, but it turns out that *she* was the visionary.

The Canaanite woman became the voice of God, the discovery of reality for Jesus – to

clarify for him the practical application of his stated openness, what he said about the way of the heart, beyond empty religion, beyond dead cultural patterns, beyond restrictive, imprisoning habits of the mind.

Here, the woman, who is the other – both as a woman and as a foreigner – insistently, persistently reached across the boundaries of human brokenness and separation.

We see Jesus NOT walking on water here, but rather captured and held hostage, in a prison of social, cultural, and racial convention – until freed by a marauding Canaanite woman – a mother who knew which way was “up” for her daughter, a mother who didn’t have the luxury of standing on ceremony, who was compelled by the heart and guidance of God.

In her, heart was speaking to heart – and isn’t this the point? – that we hear and respond to the heart of God beating in our own chests, in our own bodies – and then discovering that physical and spiritual reality literally enlivening and enfleshing our action – not only who we *are* but what we *do* – maybe even *how* we do it.

If everything were functioning “normally” – what we hear about in this reading would never have happened. The Canaanite woman was uprooted by

her daughter’s malady, Jesus was uprooted by the Canaanite woman.... And so it did.

Also, realize the Canaanite woman – this woman with faith beyond what Jesus had in the situation – could have just divided off and said, “I’ll be my own rabbi, guru, priest, healer....” Instead, her heart beat with God’s heart alongside the heart of Jesus so that both of them together from the heart (not coercion, not constraint or manipulation, not power over the other) could sing the new song, could find out what was, what is possible here on earth – from the tortured and painful life of her daughter beyond the boundaries of social convention, of race, of class, of entrenched illusions of supremacy of one group over another.

What was at stake was more than the healing of one girl. Here is the healing of the world.

Be clear, in this reading, that, as Jesus said, it was the faith of the Canaanite woman who brought about the healing of her daughter. Jesus said, “Woman, great is **your** faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” That is very different from something like, great is *my* faith, I will magically heal your daughter.

Our life in God – and the gift of our (always imperfect) welcome of all of God into our lives and into our life together is a sharing in the

One Divinity, the one Sacred Reality that enlivens the world and every person. This gift strengthens us to be for one another and to be for all of humanity what we can be – the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ – but to also be the Canaanite woman and to be her daughter, sometimes struggling, sometimes healed and whole.

This is what leads us to do what we do together here. It is the motivation for the Summer Classic this coming Saturday, for the formation of children, for feeding others in all the ways we do and all the ways we will be able to do with the community kitchen. This is why our doors are open all day every day, why we make our buildings available without fee to community-based and non-profit groups – people trying to make a

difference... and so on through all of our projects and programs....

In all we do together and as individuals, we can look into all the tortured eyes and hearts and minds in our world with its bloody and destructive divisions, polarities, greed, terrorism (domestic and international), its bigotry, its fear and find that God is revealing – on our journey, in this life, this world, a path away from the depths, to the wholeness that lives, from the creation, heart to heart – our hearts, the heart of “the other,” the heart of God – and all made real – as real as the Canaanite woman shouting at Jesus, and in so doing, revealing for him, for all, for us what it truly is – in commitment, in courage, in physical presence and in action – to sing a new song.



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