

Trinity 10
Sunday 16 August 2020
10th Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 15.21-28

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
22 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.'
23 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.'
24 He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'
25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'
26 He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'
27 She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'
28 Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

Friends, I hope you are keeping well and safe in these extraordinary days of the Pandemic.

How things have changed for us over these past few months! We talk a lot about 'new normals' and reimagining our future with questions like, 'What do we need to let go of? And what do we need to take with us as we journey forward?'

What has lockdown taught to you about yourself, the church and discipleship? What do we need to build upon? How hungry has a Eucharistic Fast made you for the Sacrament? What does it mean to be the Body of Christ in such a time as this? These are questions for all of us as we emerge out of this.

I wonder if Jesus was pondering similar questions as he reimagined the worshipping community post resurrection!

Have you noticed how 'locked-in' we can become to ways of doing things! It can be so challenging trying to cast a new vision, when people, especially those with a powerful or lobbying voice, are locked-in to how things are and are resistant to change.

We catch a glimpse of this In our Gospel reading, in the tension of the outplaying of Jesus' forward vision and the disciples locked in vision.

And there's a woman caught up in the middle, who wants to be part of the new vision.

A Canaanite woman, a young mum, shouts out to Jesus: Lord, Son of David have mercy on me. She kneels before him and pleads for her daughter. They're face to face. one seeing the future. the other seeing hope.

What do the disciples see? Well, they see a Canaanite, a woman, a non-Jew who has no right to Jesus. She should be invisible, yet here she is intruding on their space and their time and she's not doing this quietly. 'Send her away', they say to him.

You know the disciples have a real problem with blocking people from Jesus ... They'll block children, beggars, lepers and even people ministering in Jesus' name.

And Jesus relentlessly teaches them ... that he actually wants his followers us to bring people to him – he wants us to notice those on the edge, to hear the solitary cries and to help people find him. He want's people to know they are a child of God and under his judgement and mercy.

So what of this woman?

Well! I hear you saying, 'Jesus wasn't very nice to her ... in fact, he was very rude - he calls her a dog!'. What's that about?!

What I'd like to do is draw from the wonderful insight of Kenneth Bailey of Blessed Memory. Kenneth was a priest theologian who spent much of his life in Israel/Palestine living among the people and studying the scriptures from within the geographical and cultural context.

To understand this story, Kenneth tells us, we need to see a play within a play being enacted before us. This skilful technique is used elsewhere in the gospels and its often used on stage.

Jesus looks into the woman's face as she kneels before him, pleading to him. A conversation is taking place between them, But Jesus is actually speaking for the benefit of the hearer (that is the disciples and you and me). Jesus is saying, audibly, what the disciples are thinking ... 'But I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' ... and by

effectively calling her a dog, the disciples are hearing their own unspoken words.

But as Jesus speaks, there's a parallel non-verbal communication taking place. Under his gaze the woman clearly feels safe. She is able to place her trust in him ... and she has confidence, assurance and courage to play out the script.

He says, 'its not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. And she says, 'even the little dogs (even the puppies) eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table.'

It's a playful interaction between them both.

And I just can't help myself, here! (Did you catch the Eucharistic reference, : She is asking of the Giver of the Bread of Life even for the crumbs. The crumbs are enough to heal her child.

From the scriptures, we know, when people bring those in need of healing to him, Jesus responds with healing. The only time there seemed to be a problem was In Nazareth, his home town, where people just couldn't get beyond Jesus the Carpenter The son of Joseph.

We know, too, when Jesus sees faith and courage, he's deeply moved by it - he calls it out, doesn't he?!

This woman comes to him, acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (that's what Son of David means).

The disciples miss this completely - like so many of us, they're blinded by their own assumptions, prejudices and biases.

It's only when we get to the crunch line in this drama ... the climax of the story, that they get it, when Jesus says,
"O Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

The disciples and the earliest followers of Jesus needed to break the mould and expand their vision of what it meant to be the people of God. The Messiah is the Light of salvation for all the nations - he's the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 49. He is king of kings and lord of lords.

And what I love in this story is that it's the young gentile mum, who teaches us this!

It's little wonder Jesus responds by saying, 'GREAT is your faith!'

Friends, who were the people that weren't included among our members when we went into lockdown? Who are the people we have somehow blocked? As we emerge from the pandemic, what steps do we need to take to hear the cries and to see those who are presently beyond our sight? This is a whole church discussion, isn't it! And without the conversations, we may never discover the blocker within ourselves. As we emerge from all this, I pray God will draw us together into a stronger, healthier and more confident body, with a renewed vision for the poor and the excluded; a shared responsibility to reach out in Jesus' name and to lead others to him, and God give us a renewed hunger for the Living Bread;

Together, in the strength of the Spirit, may we build a bigger church, making a bigger difference; with more people knowing Jesus and more justice in the world.

Stay safe, have a lovely August and God bless you. Amen.