

Time after Pentecost August 16 2020

Worship at Home Lect A

Good morning – welcome to worship

I hope you are able to gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don't have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the ELW book. Prayers are from Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light your candle.

The Gathering

Call to Worship

Call to the Lord, who hears our prayers.
Wait for the Lord, the source of our hope.
Sing to the Lord, who delights in our songs.
Let us worship.

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn ELW 641 All are Welcome

Prayer of the Day

God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples, to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The WORD

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 Psalm 67 Romans 11:1-2, 29-32 Matthew 15:21-28

The sermon today is presented by Rev. Christie Morrow, Assistant to the Bishop of the Eastern Synod.

Matthew 15:21-28

I totally feel where the Canaanite woman is coming from. Oh do I feel her anguish and desperation. Any of us who are parents; grandparents; aunts; uncles; friends or who otherwise have children in our lives whom we love deeply, can probably relate to this mother on some level. Her daughter is sick. She will move mountains, transverse long-held boundaries, cross lines, take risks, put herself on the line ... she will do whatever it takes to make her plight known and to get help for her child. I totally get and relate to the Mama-bear in her.

What I don't get ... what pains my heart ... what gives me a whole, healthy dose of internal wrestling, is Jesus' response to her. Over the years, various theologians and commentators and authors have made every effort to try and explain away first his lack of response – he literally ignores her – and then his eventual spelling out that in no uncertain terms is his ministry meant for her ... that her status is akin to that of a dog. A foreign, unworthy, enemy dog.

To try and soften the blow of his words, some have explained that the literal translation of the Greek word “dog” in this case, is actually ‘puppy,’ as if this is somehow better ... when in all actuality, it still leaves her under the table, eating the crumbs off the floor.^{1 2} And if we're honest, Jesus' eventual response to her is difficult to hear and explain away and not at all reflective of the Jesus that I want tucked close to me.

The truth is, we may never understand what prompted Jesus to say what he did. He and his disciples had wandered into Canaanite territory – the land of a traditional enemy. THEY are the ones that had crossed the line between Jew and Gentile ... one would think they would have EXPECTED to bump up against others who practiced a different faith ... who believed different things. So Jesus, why oh why did you have to go there and say that to this woman who more than anything needed your compassion and care?

¹ Carla Works, “Commentary on Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28,” Working Preacher – August 14, 2017, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2145, accessed on June 25, 2020.

² Barbara Kay Lundblad, “Matthew 15:21-28: Teaching Jesus,” Huffington Post – August 9, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/on-scripture-matthew-15-teaching-jesus_b_921497, accessed on June 25, 2020.

There are all kinds of lines being crossed in this story. Jesus is a Jew in Gentile territory; he is deemed 'clean,' she 'unclean; the woman is speaking to a man – emphasizing a gender divide; and she is speaking to someone who ranked higher socially than she did ... Jesus was a rabbi ... someone who had studied and learned. But it would appear as though his learning wasn't over. In his book entitled *A Way Other than Our Own*, Walter Brueggemann puts forth the idea that we are watching Jesus wrestle with his own vocation and the very extent to which he is being called to cross lines in order to help the other. Brueggemann writes:

*the woman is the outsider who instructs the insider. She explains to Jesus his larger vocation that he had not yet embraced ... he learns that full faithfulness means reaching beyond one's comfort zone to the other. He now, in a new way, enacts the gathering of humanity.*³

But what a road to travel to get to this point. Holding a line against another ... being in a position of power and privilege without being totally aware that that's where you're operating from ... being called out; asked to reconsider ... to come to know more in order to do better ... does this sound at all familiar? It should in this day and age.

It was a happy time back in the early 1990s. A family had gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its matriarch and patriarch. There were several activities planned in the weekend long festivity ... teas, dinners, a mock wedding, a square dance even ... and family pictures. The ENTIRE family had gathered together to celebrate and since they didn't all gather in their entirety very often, you can imagine the boisterous noise of teasing and kibitzing going on. Arranging people for a portrait in this case was probably akin to trying to herd cats. But in arranging the family, the photographer chose to position people along the theme of light and dark ... both clothes and skin. A number of family members are black and biracial and the photographer was essentially emphasizing a visual of the line that existed but had not ever really been named or talked about in an obvious way. And so there everyone stood in a picture now frozen in time ... light on one side and dark on the other.

This family is mine. At the time, I remember my 16-year-old self took note, but I really didn't know how to name what was happening and I didn't know how to stop it. I do now and I continue to learn what this means. When I spoke to my cousins about this sermon and using this story – because it's their story more than it is mine – I had the opportunity

³ Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2016, p 18.

to hear their experience of this time and what they remember, and in some cases, the pain they still carry with them. It was a helpful and important conversation to have ... even if it took me 28 more years to finally have it.

And I guess for me, this is another point highlighted in this story. If Jesus can get these hard conversations so wrong, what does that say and mean for the rest of us? It took me way too long to talk to my cousins about this because I felt like I didn't know how and I was afraid. And I think Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman is one that gives some of us pause for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is how we too can screw up these important conversations. If Jesus can get it this wrong with the Canaanite woman ... if he can choose the wrong words ... if he can approach her unaware of what privilege he may carry in that moment ... it doesn't instill in me a lot of confidence that I ... in my own position of comfortable white privilege ... am going to get it right. But silence is no longer an option. We can no longer choose to not to engage in these difficult conversations involving race, gender, and other blatant inequalities because we fear getting it wrong and being called out on that. Choosing not to is, in fact, condoning and participating in the maintenance of racist and unequal structures and systems that are still so engrained in this world and which threaten the lives and well-being of so many.

On June 10th, Brene Brown on her podcast "Unlocking Us" hosted author, media producer, activist, educator and racial justice advocate, Austin Channing Brown. In their conversation, Channing Brown shared the following thoughts. She said:

*I tell people all the time that the work of anti-racism is the work of becoming a better human ... that's the work ... we're becoming better humans so that we treat other humans better. It's what we're doing here, even though it [can] feel terrible ... but we're also not interested in trying to hurt your feelings. We're not interested in trying to manipulate you; we're not interested in all the things that anti-racism educators get accused of. We are saying, 'I think you have the capacity to be a better human ... would you ... could you accept that invitation?'*⁴

The Canaanite woman was unwilling to walk away from this conversation with Jesus. She pressed on, even though I'm sure his words hurt her, but she pressed on because the life of her child was at stake. And, ultimately, what she offered to Jesus, was an opportunity to expand his ministry to embrace ALL of humanity ... to cross a line in order to offer love

⁴ Brene Brown, Podcast, "Brene Brown with Austin Channing Brown on I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World made for Whiteness," brenebrown.com, June 10, 2020, <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-austin-channing-brown-on-im-still-here-black-dignity-in-a-world-made-for-whiteness/>, accessed on July 4, 2020.

and care to ALL people. And for his part, Jesus hung in there, even when the conversation was difficult ... Jesus didn't allow himself to stay stuck where he was ... he didn't storm away when the Canaanite woman challenged him. He is open enough to learn from her – a desperate woman who came from an enemy territory. He allowed her to pull him over the line that had been established by years of social and religious expectation and tradition, and Jesus meets the Canaanite woman where she is at; on her turf. He ultimately heals her daughter from within her own race, culture and country ... no conversion necessary.

This is where God's grace always meets me in this story. Neither Jesus nor the woman remain bound by the lines that divided them ... the concept of ancient purity ... race, gender, education ... and even though Jesus didn't get the conversation right at the beginning, he stayed for the hard stuff; he was open to being taught and doing better. And the woman, whose desperate and stubborn refusal to see her daughter made well, she didn't give up either. She believed in this man - this preacher, teacher and healer and the love of the God she knew he embodied.

Are we going to get the hard conversations right 100% of the time? Not on your life. Do we still need to engage in these difficult but life-giving conversations? Yes. 100% of the time. Those of us who sit in a position of privilege are called to enter into these conversations in love ... to walk alongside and to be taught, which includes being quiet and listening, but then to also use our voices to advocate for and with others ... to become aware of our privilege and to use it as a means to rise up against injustice. It means being called out when we don't get it right. Just like the Canaanite woman did with Jesus so many years ago.

May it be so with us. **AMEN.**

Hymn LBW 356 –ELW 658 O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts with lyrics.

Prayers of the people are led by Cathy Zimmerling

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Lord, you gather the church to be part of your mission as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As Jesus acknowledged the great faith of a woman from outside his

people, help your church discover and find blessing in the faith of people we might reject. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have blessed us with the bounty of the earth. Grant your grace to all your creatures, that the earth will flourish. Relieve waters choked by garbage, renew soils stripped of nutrients, and refresh the air all creatures need to live. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You call the nations to be glad and sing for joy. Let your way be known among all the nations of the world, now divided by competing interests, contending alliances, and consumed by enormous worry. Bless us and make your face shine upon all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show unexpected mercy, kindness, and generosity. We pray for those who do not have enough, for outcasts in our villages, cities, and town, and for those who need your healing touch and power, *especially those from **St. James:** Joe, Joan, Shelley, & Annie. Those from **St. John's:** Ed & Rosmarie, Lucas and family, Alison Russell & Eric O.: **Friends of the parish:** Leslie, Ron K, Tere B, Lorraine, Chris & Kathy, Barb, Brenda, and Doreen.* Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In you we live and move and have our being. Grant the people of St. James & St. Johns grace to find our life refreshed in you. Accompany us in the rhythms of late summer. Give us rest and renewal, and strengthen us for mission in your name. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your eternal promises are more than we could ever imagine. As you gather all the saints, join us also with them on the great day of your salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn LBW 559 – ELW 886 Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing. With lyrics

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. **Amen.**

Dismissal Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.

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Next Sunday August 23rd will be our annual *Camp Lutherlyn Sunday*

I invite you to make a donation towards the Lutherlyn Camp by designating on the available line on your envelopes - write in: ***Camp Lutherlyn & the amount.***

There are 2 ways you can support the Camp by naming the funds on your gift.

1. **The Legacy Fund:** donations will go towards the cost of the new Comfort Station with six 3-piece unisex washrooms plus a handicapped washroom. We break ground Sept 8th. This increases our washroom capacity at camp; in the COVID-19 era where there may be a need to provide each camp cohort with a dedicated washroom, this now allows us to do that.

or

2. **The Operating Fund:** with the substantial decline in revenue this year, but the continued repair and maintenance money spent on the camp, we expect to end the year with a deficit of a few thousand dollars.

Both of our churches are heavily involved in the life of the Camp, so every donation assists the volunteer time & talent and labour that happens there. So put on your Camp clothes - even at home - and come join us next Sunday. May God bless your day!