



Sunday 6th June, 2021

Matthew 15: Even the Dogs

1. Reading:

Reading: Matt 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.

2. Questions:

- Jon made a point of saying that this passage is set in the margins – an unfamiliar place where Jesus was the stranger. What are the places for us? Do we enter them as witnesses?
- Jon suggested that cultural, religious, and historical barriers to Jesus engaging with the woman were eliminated by one simple thing – her daughter was in need. Do we eliminate such barriers when confronted by need, or are we tempted to use such definitions to condition our response?
- Jon explained the historical basis for Jesus' response, **'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'** How do you understand the evolution of God's mission to the world?
- Despite Jesus' initial silence, then comments about 'lost sheep' and 'dogs' the woman persists in faith, because she believes what Jesus can do? What stories do we have of 'the wrong people' actually expressing faith in Jesus? How do we respond?
- Jon raises three questions at the end. How would you answer these?

3. Prayer:

Pray for those we contact through:

- The Hub Response Project
- CAP
- Toddlers
- (Other places where as a church we meaningfully engage with those who are not-yet Christians).

Pray for our engagement with people who 'live in Tyre and Sidon'.

- Where is God leading us to?
- Who is God bringing to us?
- What is God asking of us?

4. Notes from the Sermon

Context:

An encounter in border country – where Jesus' character is revealed.

It appears in both Matthew and Mark.

Superficially – a difficult passage because it appears that Jesus demeans the woman in the story.

But this where the future, when our redemption is incorporated into God's story, finds its genesis.

Location:

Jesus is far north west into the territory of Tyre and Sidon. The very furthest part of the Land of Canaan (where the tribe of Asher lived). It's way off the beaten track.

Melting pot of cultures and religions. Sea ports saw people coming and going from all over the Mediterranean.

The woman:

Mark says she is a Greek woman – she is on home ground and Jesus is the stranger, Vs 23.

'tormented by a demon' – a phrase to cover a number of afflictions.

BUT – the key point is she is suffering terribly.

'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'

- Lordship
- Lineage (Son of David)
- Appreciation of his power

It is audacious for her to say this; believing that Jesus can help her. She is willing to cross religious, cultural and historical divides to find help for her daughter. Remarkable!

But Jesus says not a word.

She is persistent. But the disciples' response is akin to 'Jesus do your stuff Jesus – heal her, then we can get some peace.'

But Jesus says:

24 He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'

To understand this (allied to the Great Commission). The woman is bringing the future into the present. Jesus' mission is to Israel but on behalf of all nations.

Isaiah 49 – Israel is a light to the nations.

Jesus has sent him first to restore the chosen Children of Israel and then to free the world.

So in a manner of speaking Jesus is saying, 'Not here, not now.'

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.'

We don't know the tone of Jesus' reply. Annoyance? With a smile on his face?
But Jesus is crossing the cultural divide which the woman has created.
Engaging with her question.

'Dogs' – not a wild dog, but more likely a little dog, puppy, yapping dog.
(Perhaps Jesus senses the woman tugging at her heels). Jesus is not insulting her.

The woman's reply is staggering and brilliant.

In this part of the world, dogs do knock around the house and they find a way to get their share too – so how about me and my daughter?

This is a divine encounter. It's not a coincidence that it is between the two feeding miracles of 5,000 and 4,000 where whole baskets of bread are left over.
Jesus, staggered at her response and great faith, heals her daughter instantly.
(Jesus heals gentiles in the Gospels.)

Applications:

Matt 24 – when asked at the end of time, Jesus says the Gospel will be preached to all nations.
The full grace and compassion, the extravagance of God's love will spread out beyond the house of Israel to all people.

It perhaps seems strange that the early church took so long to understand that the Gospel went to all people – Acts 10 and Peter's dream.

Whoever knocks on the door, Jesus will come in and eat with them.

Matthew gives us a glimpse of a much broader start where Jesus is the Son of Man.

1. The enduring specialness of the Jewish race.

Recipients of the Old Covenant and gateway to the New Covenant
How can we show solidarity with Jewish people as anti-Semitism increases?

2. How are we doing compared to the woman?

We are not a small dog taking a chance at the table.
We are adopted children sitting at the table – dining at the palace.
How do we approach the table? Abba, Father?

3. Will we travel outside our comfort zone to discover what God has for us.

Where does God need us to go, physically, spiritually, to discover more? What risks, what dangers will we take?

'This earth is mostly just a boneyard, but it sure looks beautiful in the light of the sun.' Larry McMurtry