

15 Pent B 2021

[Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23](#)

[Psalm 125](#)

[James 2:1-10, \[11-13\], 14-17](#)

[Mark 7:24-37](#)

I just have to start out today by saying how much I love the Holy Spirit and how much I enjoy experiencing it in my life. The way it works is always exciting,- when I take the time to notice- and I say this because this Gospel passage about the Syrophoenician woman is, I believe, an example of how the Spirit works in our lives. This encounter with Jesus keeps showing up in my life. It always pops up when I am feeling bad or in my doubting mood. And the way things are going with all of us and this country it is like deep nourishment for my soul. We pondered and discussed this passage in our Women's Bible Study group and related our own stories of the boundaries we face as clergy women in the church and it was a reading on a recent online retreat about inclusivity and racism.

Don't you love how the Holy Spirit pokes and prods and urges?

When I think I have said all there is to say about this non-Jewish woman meeting Jesus something new always appears.

In this passage we learn that Jesus refused to be confined in a religious box. I know there are two ways of thinking about Jesus' reaction. Some think he was just testing the disciples and others feel that the woman won a theological debate and persuaded Jesus to look at an outsiders view of God differently. Thank God the evangelists preserved it in the Gospels so we could witness the moment Jesus had to look at God outside the Isrealite's box.

Through the years of my reflecting and praying on this exchange I have had to wrestle with the notion of God changing God's mind. Personally, I have no problem with the idea that God can change, indeed I have a problem with the concept of a static and unchanging God. Because how can I have a growing, vital, dynamic relationship with such a God?

We have examples in the Hebrew Scriptures how God's mind was changed in relationship with Judah and Israel. God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 26:verse 3 about the possibility of God's mind changing. And of course there is the changing intention of God in the story of Jonah—who got so upset with God's changed mind that he was “mad enough to die” (I like Jonah, I can relate). Now I know there's plenty of “I don't change” ascribed to God in Scripture also. And I do know for certain there are some things about God that won't change—God is love; God is Creator; God can be fully relied upon.

I see this encounter with the Syrophenician woman as an “aha” moment for Jesus. I think that Jesus learns something here. He believes that his mission is to the just the “children” or Israelites but then after talking with the Gentile woman he has to expand his understanding of who is chosen.

I like the idea of Jesus learning and growing and maturing in his relationship with God (how else does God change for us).

I also embrace the idea of Jesus wondering and doubting because I like to grow and wonder too and what I am wondering now is if we imagine only a perfect Christ, do we lose the human Jesus?

Jesus was divine **and** human an aspect that gets lost easily today. He did have that human tendency to first identify “outsiders” and then label them as unclean and that is still part of an ongoing struggle in the Church. This passage calls into question and challenges the church’s inclination to divide us all into insiders and outsiders and to put limits or a wall around the wideness of God’s mercy.....

Can you remember a time when God no longer acted like you were told God would act? I have had not a few instances when I was amazed at how God believed in me- Jesus made me see that just about everyone that God called, prophets, kings, apostles, evangelists, just about everyone was a reject of some sort.

What I am getting at is No matter how you view the exchange, Jesus in all his humanity, was willing to extend the boundaries of the kingdom beyond Israel. His mind is changed by the faith of one woman that was considered unclean and he understands that no longer does God have a chosen people, but a chosen **world** in which God has so willingly invited those considered unclean into a covenant that begins now and continues for ever. If we really are honest today everyone in the Christian Church could be considered an outsider. We are a graft onto the true vine of Israel, isn't that what God said?

So, the encounter with this desperate, believing woman is really all about being empowered to claim our individual place at the table. We, all of us imprisoned by sin, woman or man or any one thought to be unclean are made worthy to share God's mercy and redemption because **Jesus the Christ made it possible.**

Today Jesus tells us that the Church is wrong if we erect boundaries that **he makes clear** are invalid in God's eyes. Through his willingness to listen, and be corrected, the woman learned that God was not exclusive, or heartless and that God does not discriminate. She learned that God is more flexible than the self-righteous, religious people who said they knew God best. The Good News is Her faith in Jesus changed **her** and saved her daughters life and by her being empowered by the Holy Spirit she made us ALL worthy and equal and through her we ALL are healed.

Amen