

Sunday 16th August 2026

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15.[10-20] 21-28

Then he 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 offence 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 that place 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.

Other readings: Genesis 45.1–15, Psalm 133, Romans 11.1–2a , 29–32

Homily

This passage poses a conundrum for some. Jesus' reaction to the Canaanite woman is strikingly harsh, likening her to a 'dog' scrambling for crumbs. What are we to make of this behaviour? There are two camps of interpretation: that Jesus was testing this woman and/or his disciples, or, that he changed his mind about who his message was designed for. For the purpose of this homily, let's explore that second possibility.

Jesus was authentically human; like us, he was always in the process of *becoming*, transforming into someone new. We know this from Luke's Gospel, (2:52), where we are told "Jesus increased, (grew), in wisdom and in years ...". He may have had something of a head start, but just like you and me, he learned – from scripture, from his encounters with others, and from his experience of life. What's the evidence for this? In Hebrews 5:8 we read that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered." He learned, and for some scholars, that learning is thought to have informed his views, his theology, his message, and his practice.

These verses in Matthew model for us an attitude of remaining open to fresh insights and ideas, especially those borne of new relationships that move us - emotionally and theologically - to a new understanding. What we learn here is that it is OK to change one's mind, even if that new thinking goes against known, tried and tested tradition.

Jesus' first interaction with the woman is pretty much as one would have expected of a rabbi at that point in history. The Canaanites were considered the enemies of Israel and as such, this woman was an outsider. Jesus himself noted that he "was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (verse 24). Yet this seems staggering! He appears to be saying that his redemptive message doesn't extend to her, is not inclusive of her. But something shifts, his mind is changed, because of the words she speaks, for she calls him 'Lord.' This woman, this Canaanite woman, recognises Jesus for who he is, her Lord, before whom she kneels. She knows that his message is food for her soul, and through her persistence, (she wasn't a woman to give up easily), and her proclamation of faith, Jesus's approach to her, and to his mission, radically changed.

Jesus ignored and then dismissed this woman, and her sick daughter(!), yet he was later moved to say, " 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly." At the start of the passage, Jesus was clear his message was for God's Covenant people, Israel. By its end, no individual or group traditionally excluded are beyond the scope of his message, for it is faith alone that opens the door to the richness of God's mercy, love and his blessings. A message that was meant only for some becomes one which the disciples are later tasked to take to all nations. (Matthew 28:19).

Whether we view this passage as Jesus testing the woman, or teaching the disciples that they would need to stretch *their* perspectives and think more about people than about social or religious norms, or that he changed his mind, there are things to be learned here.

- Persistence in faith is a good thing – it is transformative.
- Dialogue with people who are different from us can bring positive change – we can learn from those we view as 'outsiders' – which in turn means we shouldn't view them as outsiders at all.
- God's mercy is available to anyone who comes to him in faith – irrespective of background or societal barriers.

As we continue to grow in understanding and wisdom about the faith we profess, may we be ever more like Jesus – that in our encounters with others, (especially those usually outside our familial, social and religious boundaries), we are open, or prompted, to learn something new about ourselves and the vocation to which we have been called as a disciple of Christ.

One final learning reflects those earlier verses about what 'proceeds' from our heart. If we're driven to disunity, disharmony with neighbours, suspicion, or a relentless need to prove ourselves and our ways 'right', we need to check what is in our heart, for our behaviour speaks volumes about who we are becoming - as individuals, and as a society. Like the Canaanite woman, and Jesus, we should practice humility better to play our part in the building of God's Kingdom here on earth.

Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. On prayerful and honest reflection, what proceeds from your heart? Can you say that you are filled with the fruits of the Spirit, (love, joy, peace, patience (forbearance), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as in Galatians 5:22-23), or is there something else? If so, what do you need to do to fashion a change of heart?
2. How easy do you find it to listen and learn from others, and then change your attitude, opinion, or mind on an idea long held? Do you judge others harshly, especially politicians, if they make a U-turn based upon new information?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*O God, you declare your almighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:
mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(Or)

*God of glory,
the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside
all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have
to gain the pearl beyond all price,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

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