



Reflection on Matthew 15:21-28

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.'

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'

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

The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said.

He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.'



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'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

A Franciscan Prayer of Blessing

May God bless you with a restless discomfort
about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you really can make a difference in this world,
so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

What a strange story this is ...

Jesus, usually looks on people with **compassion** and responds to their needs – here he seems to **ignore** the woman in her distress.

In many conversations and debates, Jesus demonstrates great wisdom and knows exactly what to say – here his words seem so unkind, and it is **the woman who shows great wisdom** and delivers the ‘punchline’.

The woman **protests loudly**, shouting out her plea, but she also **demonstrates humility**, kneeling before Jesus.

The only people who act in character are the disciples, repeating the words they have said before (e.g. at the feeding of the 5,000) when they say: **‘send her away’**.

Is Jesus having a bad day? Is he suffering from **‘compassion fatigue’**, overwhelmed by the needs around him? Is he testing the faith of the woman? Or **is he prejudiced** against her because of her racial background.



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The latter takes his **‘incarnation’**, that is the belief that he is truly, fully human, seriously and suggests that he must have been influenced by the biases and prejudices of his culture.

In this story **the teacher learns a lesson** – and his mind and heart are stretched and grow. He saw how little faith his disciples had during the storm on the sea. Now he encounters **great faith** in the words and actions of the Canaanite Woman.

Is this a new parable? **‘The Kingdom of God is when an outsider, a foreign woman, teaches the Son of God about mercy.’**

Can that be the case – can Jesus learn? More importantly for us – **can we learn?** Can we have our hearts and minds stretched and expanded, so that we see and challenge our own prejudices?



Who are we like in this story?

Do we choose to **ignore** the cries of those in need?

Or do we **dismiss** the needs of others saying: send them away, they’re getting on my nerves?

Or do we persistently and humbly campaign for **mercy**?

We’ve heard about the Kingdom – are we ready to see it made real now?

Read 1 Kings 17 and look for the similarities between this Old Testament story and the encounter that Jesus had with the Canaanite woman.