

March 5, International Women's Day and Lent 2 Mark 7:24-30

Can we help everyone? Where do we draw the line? "First put your own mask on then assist your child" we hear in the airplane safety instructions. First help your own. Charity begins at home. But does it end there?

It seems that for Jesus charity did stop there.

A non Jewish woman pleads with Jesus to help her and Jesus calls her "dog" That was rude.

People had guard dogs, but never pets.

Dogs were classified as "unclean" because semi wild packs would roam the streets and devour

dead things. People were afraid of them, and in the Psalms an enemy or persecutor could be called "dog". And then there is the proverb, recorded in the book of Job: Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine." Job 30:1

"Dog" that stands for unworthy, contemptible, scary, hostile.

And here is Jesus, replying in this very rude way to a woman who begs him to heal her child.

"it is not right to take away the food from the children and throw it to the dogs"

In other words, it is not right for me to extend my healing power to a filthy non Jewish kid and her Syrophenician mother. Healing your daughter would mean to take something away from the "children", the children of Abram, the Jewish people and give it to the less deserving.

And this is from Jesus' mouth?

Yes.

Are you shocked?

Even he—even he disappoints now? Even he---is not always kind and understanding, even he is rude?

Even he is...tense...impolite....racist??? Even he?

It looks like that. It looks like Jesus at that moment is locked in that ideology of "help your own first".

How come?

One thing we must say for sure is that Mark mentions over and over how exhausted Jesus was and how much he craved privacy. We know that healing, even at a distance cost him energy (remember the story of the woman who touched his coat?) so we hear that..".Jesus became aware that energy had gone out from him and he asked "who did this?"

He most likely had what we call "compassion fatigue". He wants to close the door and be left alone, and then this woman runs after him who is not even a Jew!

But didnt Jesus love everyone equally?

What if...what if Jesus had to get to that realization in the course of his ministry?

What if, human as he was, he needed to be taught? Gently guided into this direction?

Jesus? Needing to be taught? But wasn't he God? You will ask.

God question. Let me ask you something:

Jesus-did he drink his mothers milk from her breasts or not? Did he have to be burped as a baby and have his diapers changed, or not? Did he have to learn how to read and write or was he born a genius?

Did he have to learn the religious teachings of his people or did he know everything already?

You say yes to all this, and draw the conclusion that Jesus was a human like us you are close to the way Mark saw Jesus “a low Christology”

If you say- no wait a minute..surely he was all knowing, he was like God in a human body--- then you are close to the way John saw Jesus, you have a “high” Christology.

Now back to our gospel:

Jesus, in my view, fully human, as God embraced him, is having a bad day with compassion fatigue. He is rude to the woman. It looks like he is also showing the bigotry of his upbringing:

“Charity begins at home” --- and if it ends there is that fine?.

How Christian is it to say: Many local people live in poverty and misery, why should we sponsor refugees? Why should we be good to strangers if we cant be good to our own people?

What do you say to that?

The Syrophenician woman has an answer:

“Even the dogs get the crumbs that fall under the table”

What does that mean? In any household there are leftovers. Even those who are treated with contempt are allowed to feast on the table scraps abundance produces. We are talking leftovers. You loose nothing by healing my daughter.

She matches Jesus in her wit and quick retort. Dog? Even the dogs get fed.

She persists. She is smart and flexible and determined. What good would it be to be upset with this Jewish teacher for calling her a dog? She knows what she wants. And that is his healing power, his attention. And thus the quick retort: JShe turns the tables on him.

What do you say to that, Jesus?

How easily could he have continued an argument with her, silenced her....but silencing vulnerable people THAT is not part of his ministry. Now here is good news: Jesus listens to her.

All that time he has preached that cleanness and closeness to God is a matter of the heart, not the outside. All that time he has acted in a way that is not afraid to touch a leper or a tax collector and collaborator, nor has he had a problem with prostitutes in his presence . He has preached “love your ennemy, do good to those who hate you” yet, he thinks (and Matthew inserts this line into his version of the incident: “I am only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.

But now, could it be that Jesus realizes that his mission might be broader?

Could this be the turning point for him, faced with his prejudice against the Syrophenician—he realizes: why exclude HER?

Why draw the line when its a Syrophenician woman? Who on top has very good reasoning skills?

He gets it. He may at first not have seen the Syrophenician woman as equal, but He quickly gets it: Syrophenician lives matter. He has heard her. He does not walk away. He changes his mind, his attitude. Because of your reasoning you may go- the demon has left your daughter.

Friends --something huge happens in this encounter.. From here on....Jesus will minister to everyone who crosses his path, as much as he is able and as long as he is able.

On International women's day we celebrate this nameless woman who changed Jesus' mind.

She was not intimidated she knew what battle to pick. And she was rewarded. And of course, we celebrate in Jesus the man who listened to her. He did not dismiss, he did not ridicule, he did not walk away...he allowed her to change his mind.

In the face of the countless injustices between the sexes across the globe, this story models the way forward. Powerful Men, following Jesus, listen to woman demanding respect. Men do not lose anything by doing so, but gain in turn. Women in Canada had to argue their way into their right to vote. How many insulting comments were made to keep them from getting the vote! Just 100 years ago! Just 80 in Quebec, 60 years since First Nations women and men were granted their right to vote...Always insults, always prejudice gets in the way. Men held the power to change these laws and there were those who ridiculed women and opposed their rights. But there were also those who stopped, listened and allowed the women's reasoning to change their view.

Today,

In the face of fear and racism this story points the way forward. All of us privileged ones who sit at the table must choose how we help others. All of us can only help a limited amount of people. But none of us may choose ahead of time which group of people, which race or which ethnicity to exclude from help.

Syrophenician lives matter. Syrian lives matter. African lives matter.

Asian Lives matter. All lives matter.

Thanks be to God.