

Today's scripture reading comes from the 15th Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' ministry is in full swing. He's performed miracles. He's done the sermon on the mount. He's cast out demons, he's healed people, but he's also always making somebody mad. It seems the religious leaders of his day don't really like him and they're always questioning his authority. The Pharisees and the scribes complained to Jesus that his disciples don't wash their hands before they eat, and that's a tradition that they hold dear. Not to mention, Jesus touches untouchables and he hangs out with sinners. So all through his ministry, Jesus is pushing boundaries. He's changing the focus from rules and regulations, and he's trying to expand everybody's understanding of how vast God's love can be. So today's story is a personal favorite of mine because I love when we get to witness Jesus in the fullness of his humanity.

I love it when he loses his temper or he's rude to his mom and his siblings, or he gets frustrated. And in today's story, we really get a glimpse of Jesus in a vulnerable moment. This very human moment. Now, I do think that at this point in his ministry, Jesus has every right to be frustrated and tired of criticism, and so maybe that's why he is headed North into the region of the Gentiles. He's headed toward the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon. Maybe he wants a little vacation, get away from the scribes and the Pharisees and the people following him all the time. Maybe he wanted to lay on the beach, order a glass of water, turn it into something else. I don't know, but that's not what happened at all. So if you will turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 15, we're going to start with the 21st verse.

Hear these words from Matthew chapter 15 starting at verse 21. "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 Demons!' 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. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's 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." Here ends the reading the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

There was a girl I grew up with, I'll call her "Linda". And Linda loved to sing. And specifically Linda loved to sing in church and she and I were in children's choir together and like me, Linda liked to sing solos and worship. The problem was Linda couldn't sing. I mean, she could make sounds come through her throat and out of her mouth, but they were not decent tones. She could not, as the saying goes, 'carry a tune in a bucket' yet still she sang, and people would cringe and squinch up their faces when she'd stretched for a high note and still Linda saying little kids would put their fingers in their ears and Linda sang, people would snicker and hold back laughter, and still Linda sang. The woman in today's scripture reminds me of Linda. This woman had a lot of obstacles in her path.

For one, she was a woman and she was also a Gentile-- double whammy. Her daughter was also being tormented by a demon. So life was miserable for her and for her daughter. But somehow, somewhere, somebody told her about Jesus, that he was the Messiah and maybe she didn't even know what that meant, but she knew that God worked through Jesus to heal the sick and to ease the suffering of those who were in pain. And so she listened and she believed, maybe she heard that Jesus was in the area and she went looking for him, or maybe the word had spread about him and she was heading South as he was heading North, whatever it was, she ran into him and she started shouting that she needed him to help her heal her daughter. Now, as I mentioned earlier, I think Jesus was having a bad day, and despite his ignoring her, she shouted.

And when the disciples rolled their eyes at her, she shouted. And when they put their fingers in their ears, she shouted. And the disciples with their grubby unwashed hands seemed particularly whiny as they complained to Jesus about her yelling. So finally, Jesus addresses the woman and he seems really

curt. I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I mean, did he put his hand in her face too? It's just rude, but undeterred, the woman kneels down a posture of begging of last resort. "Lord help me!" She pleads with Jesus and Jesus gives a response that makes my jaw drop every time I hear it. It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. What is happening?

is this really Jesus

our Jesus saying these horrible things?

You see, Jesus knew that he was sent

to inspire and to teach and to save his people and as the gospels show, his plate was full already with his own people needing healing and understanding. He was trying to work with religious leaders who needed new direction and softened hearts. He had boundaries and rules to push-- meaningless rituals to shine light upon and a call to reveal God's love to God's chosen people. The agenda was full--maximum capacity. Gentiles were not in the plan and so he said, "I'm not giving the children's food to dogs." And still

She knew in the depths of her heart that only Jesus could save her daughter from the torment she was living, that only Jesus could transform their lives. And so with a brilliant retort, she surprises

Jesus and she says:

"Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table." Somebody blow an air horn! In his own work of pushing boundaries. Jesus couldn't quite push beyond his own until this woman, this Gentile, this person he clearly saw as less-than helped him see that God's love is so vast. God's power is so great. God's grace is so amazing that there are no boundaries to it. She seems to be saying, 'that's fine. Give me a crumb. That crumb is still more than enough to overpower the forces that are destroying my daughter's life. I can see that. Why can't you Jesus?' And he did. He acknowledged her faith, the faith of a Gentile woman, and he healed her daughter and their lives were changed by the power of God through Jesus Christ.

Speaking of change,

Linda kept singing until one day, believe it or not, she could actually sing beautifully. She toured in a gospel group. People paid money to hear Linda sing. And I can't explain how that happened, but maybe Linda could, maybe she could tell us how she prayed for the gift of God, of praising God in song, despite people telling her that she couldn't sing despite the faces and the snickering and how through her prayer and her persistence and her singing, God helped her find her voice. So in these days where we're being asked to stay home, maybe we can take some time to listen. See what God is saying to us in the depths of our souls to find our prayer voice, our good news voice, our singing praise voice. Find ways to express how our lives have been changed because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. And when we find it, when we find that voice of praise, may we share it with boldness, unashamed, pushing beyond any boundaries that we've constructed for ourselves or anybody else has imposed upon us. And as we share that God voice with others, may we sing and sing and sing.

Amen.