**16th August 20**

**“To the dogs?” – Matthew 15 : 10 – 20, 21 - 28**

Canaan is the land founded by Noah’s son Ham – you remember Ham, he was the one of Noah’s three sons who was shunned by his family after he saw Noah one night, drunk and naked.  Noah cursed Ham, whose name he changed to Canaan, and vowed that Canaan would forever be cursed and that his descendants would always be slaves to the descendants of his brothers.  Thus, in ancient Israel, the people of Canaan were **thought** **of** as cursed and were felt to be beneath the lowliest of Jews.

So the Canaanite woman comes hounding Jesus, calling and pleading at Him incessantly, “Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!”  Usually in scenes like this, the disciples want the bothersome person to go away and leave them alone, while Jesus compassionately tells them to let the person come to Him, and then He grants whatever He is asked, but not here.  This is a different story altogether.  Here, the woman cries and pleads for help and Jesus does what?  He IGNORES her.  Jesus, the compassionate lover of souls; Jesus the Good Shepherd; gentle Jesus, meek and mild; IGNORES her.  But wait … it gets worse!

Jesus said, “It is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

I don’t think Jesus was ONLY trying to give us an object lesson here.  I think what we see in this story is the truly human Jesus learning a lesson of His own from God the Father, because Jesus was fully human and truly divine.  Jesus’ mission up to this point had been to care for the children of Israel and to try and reconcile them with their YHWH, and to the fulfilment of their destiny as God’s chosen people.

For the fully human Jesus, I think His ministry unfolded in front of Him, much as our own lives do.  So, when Jesus treated this woman as a dog, as anonymous and sub-human, I can just hear the voice of the Father in His ear, “ Hold on there Son - Hold on just a minute.  I ***made*** this one, just the same as I made all the others – including You.  They are ***all*** My children.  They are all worth the same to Me.  Get to know her and see what you think.”  So Jesus stops ignoring her and listens with those compassionate ears we’re used to, when she says, “Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” and He suddenly sees her for what she is, a child of God who is faithfully praying for help.

 Who are the dogs in your life?  Who is it in your world who is so inconsequential that they don’t rate being treated as well as you treat your friends and loved ones? And why do you think they are dogs?

Who ***are*** the dogs in your life?  And there can be plenty of reasons why we think they are.  The dogs in our lives are the people we prejudge – the people whose worth we judge as less than our own, simply because of some characteristic about them that we don’t like, don’t approve of, or simply don’t understand.  Perhaps it’s people of different ethnic background than your own.  Have you ever told a joke, or laughed at one, that made fun of someone else’s ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, or any other characteristic - in a cruel or demeaning way?    We have all heard them.  We’ve all heard them, we’ve probably told them, we’ve almost certainly laughed at them.  How is that different from Jesus calling the Canaanite woman a dog?  Aren’t both dehumanising.

Still, the woman persisted.  Matthew says, “But she came and worshiped him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.'” (15:25)  Once again, Jesus refused.  He said, “It is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”  But she wouldn’t take no for an answer.  She said, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

“Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (15:28)

Now, if this chapter is all about ritual purity, what does this Canaanite woman have that the Pharisees and scribes don’t have? I think it is about humility.

She has humility … and a big dose of it.  And it’s her humility – her willingness to let go of every bit of pride she has and throw herself at the feet of Jesus that leads her daughter to be healed and secures a place for herself among Jesus’ followers.

**Humility – humility.**

Sisters and brothers, always remember, the kingdom of God is not just about us or what we want, it is about all of us together – with all Creation. Pride and selfishness usually make very good travel companions.

This pandemic and present situation are forcing us onto a journey that requires less anxiety and more trust in the Lord, less pride and selfishness and more patience and compassion.

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