

# THERE IS ENOUGH

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time; August 14, 2011

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*Come, Spirit Come.*

*Persist Among Us.*

*Teach us something new.*

*In Christ I pray. Amen.*

The Scripture reading comes from the gospel of Matthew, the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter, reading from verses 21-28. Listen now for a Word from the Lord.

*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 Jesus did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came up 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**A**t this week's More Than A Meal service, which was supposed to be a quiet service of wholeness and healing, I wondered if I was meeting a demon face to face, or if I was being challenged about what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Sitting beside the communion table, church member and faithful disciple, Betty Gandy, played quiet melodic hymns on her guitar. With her gift of music, she set the tone for a reflective worship service taken from the *Book of Common Worship*; a service of healing and wholeness that we offer once a month at the More Than A Meal worship.

This service includes the laying on of hands, individual prayer and the anointing of oil. Before we could arrive at that particular portion of the liturgy, a young man, Sebastian, in his striped blue and white shirt and neatly trimmed hair, stood up completely unannounced, uninvited, and unexpected. He came to the piano and played a noisy riff. Turning from the piano as he returned to his seat he said aloud, "The Lord says, make a joyful noise to the Lord. And this is the Lord's house. And I'm making a joyful noise."

Surprises like these you really can't anticipate and they aren't described in seminary textbooks. When Betty was asked to lead worship, we didn't discuss spontaneous accompaniment. Betty took the path of going with what unfolded, going with the impulsive interruption, going with the genuine flow in the moment - however strange.

As I introduced scripture that night I set it in context. The story of the Canaanite woman and her persistently loud request for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter comes between two feeding miracles. The feeding of the 5,000, where after men, women and children had been fed — there are 12 baskets of left-over and the feeding of the 4000, where after the feeding of the men, women and children — there are seven baskets left-over. Not only is it tucked in between feeding miracles, the story includes a verbal challenge to Christ about who gets to eat the crumbs that fall from a table.

I summed up by saying something like, "This story of a woman seeking help for her daughter is tucked into stories of God's good abundance for all. And the irony is that in between stories of baskets of left overs is this story about the minutia of crumbs." After this set up for the reading of this oddly placed scripture, I caught Sebastian's eye from his seated position. And my mind went, "Uh Oh."

Sebastian stood up. The setting sun silhouetted his figure in the side chapel windows. I really couldn't see his face, but I could hear him clearly. He said in bullet like speech, pointing at me, "The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke, Chapter 14: 26-27. Line it out preacher. Line it out."

I looked at him and I must have had the Presbyterian-deer-in-the-headlights AND the *I-wasn't-raised-with-Bible-sword-drills* look. Sebastian said more slowly, "Speak it, now. Preacher. Speak it."

My mind was still processing the piano event — and now the scripture reading was getting challenged. This loud seemingly impulsive interruption was asking me to do something different than I had planned. He was shouting and demanding that I consider the Word from a different perspective. Was this a demon or a challenge to discipleship?

As Presbyterians, we don't talk much about demons, so this challenge for me became about discipleship. I learned from Betty Gandy about how to remain a non-anxious disciple, and was willing to dig into the different scripture. I flipped from Matthew through to Luke and read Chapter 14:26-27, ironically - *the cost of discipleship*.

Reading from Luke 14: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

I thought then in the chapel, in this supposedly reflective healing service, "I began with the context that today's story is tucked into the story between beautiful pictures of God's graceful abundance, available to all — men, women and children — with baskets full of left overs. But

Sebastian's selection reminded us that discipleship is personally expensive and very difficult.

Worship did move into the reading of the Canaanite woman's story and on through the prayers where we prayed for mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters; laying on hands and anointing with oil. Love was the dominant narrative.

When the Canaanite woman confronts Jesus, he is in her land. He has this totally human moment in which he ignores a woman's shouts. All she wants is her daughter to be well. The text says, "Jesus did not answer her at all."

In Deuteronomy, the meaning of Jesus' rejection of the Canaanite woman is laid out in the 'rules of warfare.' "...You shall annihilate ... the Canaanites, ... so that they might not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord, your God."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus and his disciples were Jewish — They knew these scriptures, even though Canaanite wasn't a term used in Jesus' day. Jesus' form of annihilation was the silent treatment. Maybe Jesus was thinking, "Pretend like she's not there and she'll quit her shouting and go away."

The Canaanite woman must have kept shouting through Jesus' silent treatment because the disciples beg Jesus to send the irritable, noisy, shouting woman away.

Sending people away is not what disciples are supposed to do. Surely these disciples had learned when they had suggested to Jesus that he dismiss the 5000 people before they got hungry — and Jesus had said, "No, you feed them, because that's what God can do through you." And there was plenty left over.

In response to the disciple's pleadings, Jesus answers "I wasn't sent for her type, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Barbara Lundblad, preaching professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, says of Jesus in this exchange, "Jesus says some terrible things. He's arrogant, racist and just plain mean. We may believe that Jesus was "truly human," but we don't want him to be too human."<sup>2</sup>

The disciples are caught in the paradox of living a life of discipleship. Do we listen and serve a hurting woman and cast out her daughter's demons, or do we ignore her because she's not a lost sheep, she's not one of us, she's 'just an outsider'? While the disciples are lost in their pondering, the Canaanite woman resolves the discipleship paradox.

She turns it from an either-or, to a both-and situation. By persisting in a worshipful way, by speaking her truth as she lives it, and by crying "Help me, even puppies eat crumbs."

When the woman pushes back against Jesus and says, "Yes. Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." The Greek that is used for dogs actually means,

“little dogs, puppies” not the snarling Alpha Dog who’s going to get the choice bones, but the weakest of the pack. In other words, she says, “There is enough for the least of us.” Yes, leftovers.

Jesus responds, “Great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.” May our faith be as persistent as hers, and might we, and those whom we love, be made whole.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 20:16-18. These laws suggest a certain hostility to the Canaanites, their religion and their “abominable ways of life.”

<sup>2</sup> [http://day1.org/3210-on\\_scripture\\_barbara\\_lundblad\\_teaching\\_jesus\\_matt\\_152128](http://day1.org/3210-on_scripture_barbara_lundblad_teaching_jesus_matt_152128)