

Worship At Home August 16, 2020
By Joan Marshall and Anne Moore

Centering Prayer:

Holy God, powerful and faithful one,
we come to you this Sabbath day
to hear your word of truth.
May our faith be challenged.
May our faith be empowered.
May our faith be provoked.
May our faith be encouraged.
May our faith be called into action.
May our faith give us courage to act. Amen

Written by Nora Vedress.

Gathering, Summer/Autumn 2009, page 39.

Used with permission.

Music

Spirit, Open My Heart

<https://youtu.be/YMoG9C-0iZw>

Opening Prayer:

God of summer heat and slow-moving paces,
God of storms and promising rainbows,
Bless us and draw near on this Sunday morning.
Hear our prayers,
and respond to our need for your ever-present
love and grace. Amen

Written by Melanie Kauppila.

Gathering, Summer/Autumn 2009, page 38.

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Scripture Reading: Matthew 15:21-28 (from the Inclusive Bible)

Jesus left there and departed for the district of Tyre and Sidon. It happened that a Canaanite woman living in that area came and cried out to Jesus, "Heir to the House of David, have pity on me! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed. Jesus gave her no word of response. The disciples came up and repeatedly said to him, "Please get rid of her! She keeps calling after us." Finally Jesus turned to the woman and said, "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." She then prostrated herself before him with the plea, "Help me, Rabbi!" He answered, "But it isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." "True, Rabbi," she replied, "but even the dogs get to eat the scraps that fall from the table." Jesus then said in reply, "Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass." At that very moment her daughter was healed.

Reflection:

I'm wondering what your thoughts are about this story of the Canaanite woman and her interaction with Jesus. It has always been a difficult story for me to read and try to understand. This is not the Jesus I thought he was, he certainly doesn't fit the image I've always had of him – the person who encouraged women, spoke out in support of them, was inclusive, a supporter

of social justice and a person who was loving, patient and kind. In Sunday School we were taught that Jesus showed love to everyone. This story makes me uncomfortable.

So how do we interpret this story? What does it suggest about Jesus and the path he is following? At the time of this story he has performed a series of quite amazing miracles including feeding the 5,000, walking on water and healing many people he has encountered on his travels. We also know that he has done some amazing teaching which has changed people's lives and that he has discussed/argued theology with the best of the religious leaders, challenging them constantly. In fact, he is at the high point of his vocation.

Now he's ventured into a new area – Gentile Canaanite territory. In this area he is a stranger and probably not well received by some. And here he is challenged himself by a Canaanite, a woman, who doesn't back down. First of all he doesn't answer her, then he tells her he is only here for the people of Israel, then he compares her people to dogs – not complimentary! This woman reminds Jesus that being called less than a dog is hurtful, as dogs are often treated better than she might be.

I wonder a lot about this woman – who is she? One thing I do know is that she is strong and brave. She is a parent who loves her daughter deeply and that she will go to great lengths, including begging Jesus, to have her healed. What would her life be like without her daughter? She must have heard all the stories being told about Jesus healing and this was most probably her last resort. I'm wondering if she thought about what Jesus might say to her and formulated her answers ahead of time, as she seems to know exactly what to say to him. She doesn't back down, she doesn't accept the labels or the limits put on her. She also doesn't accept the limits which Jesus puts on his mission.

And another miracle happens. Jesus listens to her, he learns from her and in the course of that interaction he grows and changes. We all know how difficult it is to say "Yes, you are right and I am in the wrong", but he does that and he also acknowledges her great faith. She made him realize that a woman outside his religious community had faith in his ministry.

So what can we learn from this story that we can incorporate into our journey? We all know the old tapes that can play in our heads about the fact that we are not good enough, smart enough, important enough to make a difference. Maybe we can find the courage in this story to stand up for ourselves and give ourselves credit for what we can do. If we want to reach our spiritual potential we need to step outside our comfort zone and trust, in other words have faith in what God is encouraging us to do.

This story also tells us that we are able to make changes in situations which affect ourselves and other people. We often hear people say that they are just one person, they can't make a difference, that what they have to say is not that important. Here we have one Canaanite woman who was brave and spoke up. She changed Jesus' mind - what an achievement! At this very moment in time we are experiencing a huge cultural shift in how people are treated – here in Canada it is not only the Black community but also our Indigenous community who need support. Today, this story challenges us to be a strong advocate, to open our ears, minds and hearts so that we can really listen to what our brothers and sisters (created by God) are saying. They are tired of being treated as if they are less than us, of being subjected to different rules and regulations because of how they look and talk, and because of the colour of their skin. We have to stop making presumptions and judgements, we need to educate ourselves and

acknowledge that they are strong, beautiful people who can offer so many gifts which will help us to become a loving world where everyone is equal.

Do we have the trust and faith that what we say and do, either individually or as a faith community, can make a difference? It means that we will have to listen, learn, grow and change, it means we need to have the courage to stand up and speak out and know that we not only have the right to do so but that we need to do so! If Jesus and a Canaanite woman can achieve this, what's stopping us?

Music

We Rise Again

<https://youtu.be/Wuiqee-AC-o>

Prayers of the People

God of infinite care, source of that love which never end:
we praise you for the breadth of your concern for your whole creation.
Each of us, in our need and hope, is precious in your regard.
None of us is left out.
All of us together are collected in your embrace.
You delight at our triumphs and grieve at our failures.

You invite us to come to you with our pain or fear or worry,
So that you may instill in us the strength of spirit we need
To carry on and the trust in you we need if we are to make a good life.
We give you thanks.
The gift you want to give us is that love which, as Paul said,
"Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,
endures all things."

And so we pray for ourselves and for those we know who need
That gift from you.
We pray for endurance, for all dealing with chronic illness,
or injury, or a sudden threat to our health.
We pray for belief, an openness to your new truth, and a
faithfulness to your old truth, for all who are confused or
struggling to find a compass to guide their lives.
We pray for hope, for all who mourn the death of someone dear,
for all who confront other types of loss.
We pray for all today who are called on to bear many things.
And we pray for ourselves.

God of infinite care, source of that love which never ends:
strengthen, inspire, encourage, and bless us,
through your great gift to us, Love incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Written by Rod Sykes

Gathering, Advent, Christmas & Epiphany, 2000, p. 29

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Closing Music

There Is Room For All

<https://youtu.be/OlyOn1LtSn4>

Blessing

God has called you to live in integrity and justice.
May you love mercy, act justly and walk humbly with God.

Jesus has shown you how to love your enemies and neighbours.
May you see to be peacemakers and to live in God's light.

The Holy Spirit has comforted and disturbed you with God's peace.
May you be full of joy and courage all the moments of your nights and days.

May Almighty God bless you:
the Maker and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen
by Ruth Burgess from *Bare Feet and Buttercups*

Music

The Blessing – Canada

<https://youtu.be/BSuwlEaQi54>

(well worth listening to the entire blessing)