

## Matthew 15. 21-28

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21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.<sup>22</sup>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.'<sup>23</sup>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.'<sup>24</sup>He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'<sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'<sup>26</sup>He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'<sup>27</sup>She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'<sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

What was your reaction when you heard the gospel reading this morning? It isn't a comfortable story, especially if you are a woman.

Jesus is in the *district of Tyre and Sidon* which was a Gentile region. As he walks along with his disciples a woman approaches and starts shouting. Given she isn't Jewish the way she addresses Jesus is interesting. '*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David...*' Had she heard that he was possibly the Jewish messiah? Initially, Jesus ignores her cry, which is exactly what the disciples would expect, and want, him to do as a Jewish Rabbi. '*Send her away*, she's a nuisance, they urge! But Jesus comes out with a strange statement. '*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*' Who is he speaking to, the disciples or the woman? Actually, he is engaging with both for different reasons. The woman's love for her daughter and her confidence in him seem to impress Jesus, and he is going to help her. But he is also going to use the occasion to challenge the deeply rooted prejudices in the hearts of his disciples. The reaction of the woman is to kneel before Jesus and simply beg '*Lord, help me.*' Jesus now sets her a test. Tests of our faith are not always bad. They can strengthen our resolve and teach us new things about God' faithfulness. A coach only puts the toughest runner in the hardest race. This woman will win this with flying colours. However, it sounds harsh to our ears.

In referring to dogs, Jesus is using a Jewish term of racial insult. However, one commentator suggests that Jesus is engaging in some banter with this woman, which would have been conveyed by his tone of voice or even an expression of humour in his eyes. The woman is certainly not put off. She accepts the insult, and deftly turns it with a touch of humour, into a renewed request. '*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.*' She knows she has no claim on this Jewish Messiah. She knows that dogs can't have the children's portion and she is not asking for that. But she will accept crumbs. With this tongue in cheek response she demonstrates the depth of her courage and faith.

I wonder what the disciples are thinking now. You see Jesus was verbalizing and acting out their deep prejudices, about women and Gentiles, to force them to confront the implications of their thoughts. They thought she was unworthy of his attention. He demonstrates she has exemplary faith. And it is not the first time that Jesus has taken his disciples out of their comfort zone to teach them something important.

So, when have we found ourselves out of our comfort zone? What situations have challenged our faith and trust in God? When should we be aware of Jesus standing alongside us challenging our prejudices, our stereotypes, be they cultural, racial, social or religious? How embarrassed would we be to see them acted out in front of our eyes? To see with the eyes of Jesus is always a challenge.

But there is another, very poignant side to this story. Jesus recognizes that this woman is a carer, and that she is at the end of her tether. If you are, or have been a carer, you will know that caring is relentless and lonely. The daughter was not able to feel what the mother was enduring. So this mother just begs '*Lord, help me.*' And Jesus simply responds: *Let it be done for you as you wish.*

This story leaves us with two questions: Do we trust Jesus to meet us at our deepest point of need and how are we praying about this? And, are we courageous enough to ask him to expose our deeply rooted prejudices that we might see with his eyes?