

## Sermon for Sunday August 20, 2017

### Matthew 15:21-28 – Canaanite woman challenges Jesus

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

My oldest son Isaac is a University student and has two jobs. Isaac works at the Co-op gas bar in Blairmore as a cashier selling gas, cigarettes and lottery tickets. Isaac's second job is at Earl's a restaurant downtown – he is a waiter but more often than not he bartends – selling alcohol. Yes my precious son sells cigarettes, lottery tickets and booze – I couldn't be prouder.

Truly I couldn't be prouder as he works very hard. Isaac also has some incredible stories to tell as a result of these jobs. Isaac shared a story with me Thursday when he got home after working a bar shift at Earls. Apparently there was a couple at one table and a group of three young guys at another – the tables are close together. At the one table - where the couple where - the woman placed an order and so too did the man she was with. The guys at the table next door were chatting quietly and enjoying a beverage. When the waitress returned with the couples order the woman was very angry – she told the waitress that she had gotten the order incorrect. She was loud and rude as she explained to the waitress what she really wanted – the guys at the next table heard the rude exchange and began to get involved – “we heard what you ordered – she didn't make a mistake. The woman was instistant that the waitress had brought the wrong thing and began to get louder and more angry. Finally the manager was called. As the woman spoke to the manager the guys kept chiming in - correcting her version of what transpired. The manager did what the manager had to do and made a correction to the complaining woman bill and assigned a different waitress to the table but then he went over to the original waitress to check if she was okay and to thank her for handling things so well. The three guys - who spoke up for the waitress - left her a ridiculously large tip.

What I love about the story is that those guys who were sitting next door didn't have to stick up for the waitress – they didn't know her – they could have just continued watching the game but perhaps inspired by their beverages they felt the need to stand up for the young waitress and for the truth.

The other day in Martinsville a woman, Ashten Heibert was in the Dollarama store with her kids. Two men were getting into a loud conversation about the protest in Charlottesville, Va, where white nationalist clashed with anti-racist protesters and one woman was killed after being struck by a car. The conversation got louder and louder, and one of the men started using profanity and the N word. The report says Ashten said to the man “Excuse me sir, could you please lower your voice, because I have two little kids. What you're saying is really hateful and it's wrong.” When the man turned and began to advance toward her another person stepped in and spoke to the man. Eventually he was removed from the store.

What I love about this story is that the young mom of two, Ashten Heibert didn't have to say anything to the man speaking hateful words , she could have just picked up

her dollarama swag and got out of there. But inspired by her children she stood up for human decency and for the truth.

The passage that Carolynn read for us this morning from the Gospel of Matthew describes one of the difficult moments in Jesus' life that we might like to skip over but the lectionary invites us to deal with. What makes it so difficult is how harsh and downright rude Jesus words sound. First he refuses to answer a woman pleading for his help, then he denies that he has anything to offer "her kind" and finally he likens her to a dog.

The problem is that this is a Canaanite, one of the great unwashed with whom observant Jews of Jesus time had little contact. She comes from the coastal region of Syria where strange gods are worshiped and ritual laws of cleanliness are unknown.

In today's story Jesus has just come from Nazareth, his own hometown, where his friends and family have doubted his authority and taken offense at his teaching. He has recently received word that John the Baptist has lost his head to a crazy king and he has tried hard to withdraw from the crowds for a while, but the crowds have followed him – and he has feed them with two fish and five loaves. Then there was the storm at sea and Peter's wish to cross the water, ruined by Peter's fear and doubt.

Everywhere Jesus turns he finds need- need and people who want what he can do for them but who remain blind to who he is. He is at the frayed end of his rope, and all but used up.

Then comes the Canaanite woman crying out to him to heal her daughter – one more of the needy multitudes who want something from him – only this one does a shocking thing: she calls him by name, "O Lord, Son of David." // It is the title reserved for the Messiah, the title his own people have withheld from him. When this woman addresses him as the Son of David, she names something in him that even his own disciples have failed to recognize, and it must seem like a mean trick of fate to him to hear what he most wants to hear coming from the mouth of someone he least wants to hear it from.

So he does not answer her. He draws the line.

But the woman will not stay on her side of the line. Kneeling at his feet, she says, "Lord, help me." Jesus has dismissed her but she will not be dismissed; she has gotten her foot in the door before Jesus can close it in her face, and she shows no sign of leaving before he has dealt with her. "Lord, help me," she says and I can only imagine that Jesus blood pressure goes up. How could he be more clear – so he says it louder and more clearly -"It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. Ouch

But the Canaanite woman simply will not budge. Her response to Jesus reminds me of that game children play, in which two of them look steadily in to each other's eyes, each trying to make the other blink first. Jesus all but claps his hand in the woman's face, but she does not blink. "Yes Lord," she says when he calls her a dog, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." When she says that, something in Jesus snaps, He blinks. His anger dissolves. Something in him is rearranged and changed forever. "O woman, great is your faith," he says to her. "Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter is healed instantly. The line he had

drawn between him and the woman disappears; the limits he had place on himself vanish, and you can almost hear the huge wheel of history turning as Jesus comes to a new understanding of who he is and what he has been called to do. He is no long a Messiah called only to the lost sheep of Israel, but God's chosen redeemer of the whole world.

Isn't that the way it goes? Over and over, {God's "call" to us} means pushing old boundaries, embracing outsiders, giving up the notion that there is not enough of us to go around. We may resist; we may even lose our temper but the "call" of God is insistent, as insistent as the Canaanite woman who would not leave Jesus alone. The call of God keeps after us, calling us by name, until finally we step over the lines we have drawn for ourselves and discover a whole new world on the other side.

The guys at Earls could have kept quiet, minded their own business but, perhaps bolstered by their beverages, they chose to stand up for the waitress who was being yelled at and wrongly accused of a mistake. As for the young Martinsville mom Ashten, she could have kept her head down finished her shopping and slipped away but, perhaps inspired by her children, she stood up for human decency and named out loud that racism is wrong.

The Canaanite woman could have kept silent, she could have accepted that her daughter would die, accepted that she was not worthy of attention - little own the help of someone like Jesus, but instead perhaps bolstered by the love of her daughter and perhaps by the hope she witnessed in seeing Jesus – feed thousands, eat with sinners and saints, and who watched Jesus heal others without question of worthiness - she cried out and stood her ground.

Friends we are living in times when we cannot afford to be comfortable. There are places we need to go that are uncomfortable and challenging, there are lines we need to cross. We cannot let the hate and violence, the racism and bigotry like that expressed in Charlottesville go un-answered. Those who killed innocent people in Barcelona in the name of their understanding of their religion need to be set straight.

Here is the thing - the people who perpetrated hate and racism and white supremacy – those who supported the attack and who knew about what would happen in Barcellona – most of those folks got up Monday morning and went to work. Some of those people got up Monday morning and put on a suit or a uniform or an apron. Sometimes - like them they even sit across the table from us at supper. Sometimes we are them when we refuse to let go of our own "isms". We can go to rallies and stand on the other side of the barricade, we can sign petitions and wear anti racists t-shirts. But I am convinced that we need also to speak clearly and loudly in our own lives – in our everyday living. We need to step over the line and speak words of love and compassion of respect and abundance - today. We need to speak up at the restaurant or at the dollar store or the street corner.

So let's go! Let us step out! Look a Canaanite in the eye, knock on a strangers door, ask an outsider what his life is like, trespass an old boundary, enter a new relationship, push a limit, take a risk, give up playing it safe! You have nothing to lose but your life the way it has been, but that is okay because there is lots of new life to live. And if you get scared, which you will, and if you get mad, which you probably will too, remember today's story. With Jesus as our model – we are called to step over the lines

we have drawn for ourselves, not because we have to, and not because we ought to, or even because we want to, but because we know that it is God's own self who waits for us on the other side.

*Friends the guys at earls might have been emboldened by their beverages, the mom's might have been emboldened by the love of their children but we – we are embolden by the very gifts of God - the gifts of bread and juice. But before we receive this meal of God's blessings let us first share what we have of our time, talent and treasure for the glory of God. The offering will now be received.*