

Ordinary 20A – 2026

Jesus and his disciples are sharing in a time of learning. An outsider breaks into their fellowship. The outsider is Canaanite, which to the ears of the early church would ring of heretic, blasphemer. The outsider is also a woman and a mother. I mention that she is a woman because in the time of Jesus women would not normally address men in public. Such a break with social custom would seldom be tolerated. Such an intrusion would hardly ever be responded to in any way but to dismiss the woman, her words, and her reason for being there. This outsider comes to Jesus asking that her daughter be healed.

And, breaking with the norm as Jesus was so prone to do, he engages her in conversation. To enter into conversation with another is at the very least an acknowledgement that they exist.

To respond to the request of another is at the very least a means of acknowledging the other as an equal. Yet, at the same time, the words of Jesus do not sound like something one would say to another who is now being considered on the same plane. My purpose is with the children of Israel, not the "dogs" of Canaan! These are certainly not words that one would hear as being spoken to an equal. Is Jesus caught in a moment of incongruity? Does Jesus not really accept this Canaanite woman as an equal? Or, is something else happening here? Some moments are ripe for teaching. The thing that makes some moments more ripe for teaching than others is that those who need to learn something have the opportunity to experience it as in "overhearing a conversation" rather than being directly spoken to. Overhearing a conversation allows us to stand back, just a bit, and hear things differently. In overhearing the more difficult words become less difficult to absorb ... to take them in and allow them to have their way with us. The indirect experience of overhearing takes the edge off so that the radical nature of the message can find its way to our core before our bias and prejudice has a chance to filter.

To make my point, allow me — if you will — some poetic license with the conversation between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. The Canaanite woman comes to Jesus with the request that her daughter be healed. The disciples find this to be, not only inappropriate, but downright unacceptable. So, for the sake of the disciples — that they might learn a very important lesson in overhearing a conversation — Jesus (as with a wink in his eye for the woman) states what the disciples and others of that day would accept as being "right on".

"I am here for the children of Israel," says Jesus, "not for those Canaanite dogs (as they are so often called)!" Seeing a glimmer of hope in his eye — even as Jesus says those words coupled with an invitation to change some minds — the Canaanite woman retorts, "Yes, but even the family's puppies get to eat the crumbs under the table!" (her own statement in the same mood and tone of Jesus). "Ah ha!" exclaims Jesus, "you are a person of great faith!" And somewhere in overhearing those words the woman's daughter was not only healed, but the disciples caught a glimpse of grace — a moment of being in the realm of God where all people are equal and of like value in God's love which created, in God love's whom redeems, in God's trust that somehow, someday, we will all finally "get it!"

How can we come together as a people and get beyond the lines we have drawn?

Abram said or did something that I can't agree or like, so do I hate all people who look like him, all people from where he was born, all people with his skin color, all people with his sexual preference, all people who belong to his political party, all people with his status: citizen, here legally, here illegally?

In the conversation that Jesus shared with the Canaanite woman, he lifted up a moment when a word ... a term ... a racial slur ... a theological dogma would be divested of all its power. The dogs become puppies and the puppies become a part of the family. It might not seem like a big thing, but think about it for a moment — never again would the term "dog" be used to speak about a Canaanite person.

No, we do not know for sure that such was the case ... but we do know that there is no other reference in the Scriptures to the Canaanite people as such. It is possible that the lesson "overheard" that day helped the disciples move on to a different place ... a better place.
(by Gary L Lake Dillensnyder at gdillensnyder@comcast.net)

Don't Jump to Conclusions

A family of five was enjoying their day at the beach. The children were playing in the ocean and making sand castles when in the distance a little old lady appeared. Her gray hair was blowing in the wind and her clothes were dirty and ragged. She was muttering something to herself as she picked up things from the beach and put them into a bag. The parents called the children to their side and told them to stay away from the old lady. As she passed by, bending down every now and then to pick something up, she smiled at the family. But her greeting wasn't returned.

Couple weeks later this family learned that little old lady was a retired school teacher who'd made it her lifelong crusade to pick up bits of glass from the beach so children wouldn't cut their feet. And as she picked up the broken glass, she prayed for the people who had dropped it, even though she didn't know who they were.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gave his life on the cross so that we might know the love, forgiveness and acceptance of our God. Jesus died for each of us personally. We can't look at another human being without thinking to ourselves, Jesus died for them, too. We do a disservice when we jump to conclusions about people because of how they look, where they live or the type of work that they do. We are all equal Jesus' eyes.

(by Billy D. Strayhorn from *From the Pulpit*, CSS Publishing Company)