

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
16/08/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 45: 1-15	Joseph makes himself known to his brothers
Psalms 133	The Joy of Good Relationships
Romans 11: 13-32 (33-36)	Grafted and Broken Branches The wonder of God's mercy
Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28	It's what's in your Heart, not what you eat that makes you unclean Canaanite Woman's Daughter healed by Faith

Introduction

Today I'd like to focus on the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman. I'd like to start by asking a few questions.

Firstly, who got up this morning and consciously acknowledged that they were a gentile? – that is that they were not part of God's originally chosen race the Israelites? If you didn't, that's ok because I didn't either.

This next one's a bit easier, who knows what religion Jesus grew up in? When I asked this question once at a school religious education class I received the answer, "Anglican wasn't he?" Of course we know Jesus was a Jew. He grew up fulfilling all the requirements of a good Jewish boy and man.

The reason I asked these questions was to emphasize the gulf which would have existed between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. To be a Jew meant to have nothing to do with Canaanites. We can just look at the current political situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians to get an idea of how far apart these two were. Then there is also the cultural setting of the time. An upright Jewish man wouldn't be seen in public talking to a woman, let alone one who was a Canaanite.

But Jesus breaks down the barriers, just like he did with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Today I'd like us to look at the way Jesus came for Everyone, the way Jesus calls us to put our Faith in Him, and that when we put all of our faith, and hope, and trust in Jesus, we become a part of God's Family

Meaning of the Story

So what is this story about. Some Bible's have section headings, and one Bible I had gave the story this heading - "Jesus sends a demon out of a girl"

Now we know that happens in the story, but I don't think it's the point of the story.

The story mostly contains a dialogue between this Canaanite woman and Jesus. I think it is through this that Jesus is letting us know that, his message, that fullness of life through Him, is not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. And that includes you and I.

As we look at Matthew's Gospel, we know it was written specifically to a Jewish audience. Matthew's gospel contains the most references back to the old testament of prophecies which Jesus fulfills. So Matthew is very careful to show that Jesus is the Messiah that the Jewish nation has been expecting.

Even though Matthew has a very Jewish outlook, as the gospel progresses there is a very clear sense that Jesus' Ministry has much greater implications than just the Jewish nation. This meeting of Jesus and the Canaanite woman is part of the progression.

In chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus send out the 12 disciples, but only to the lost sheep of Israel. At the end of Matthew's Gospel we hear the Risen Jesus give the disciples the great commission. Telling them to go and make disciples of all nations.

As Christians today we are witnesses to Jesus' command. We are his disciples, even though we live a long way away from Galilee. As disciples of Jesus today we know that Jesus is the "Good News" for all humanity, and we are called to witness to this in our lives.

Details of the Story

But what about the details of the story. In Matthew's Gospel the descriptions are usually shorter than in that of Mark's gospel, As Matthew is more of a teacher, getting to the point whereas Mark is more of a Storyteller. Matthew obviously thinks this part of Jesus's life is very important as he includes a lot more detail than Mark does in this instance.

Jesus has quite a conversation with this woman. She has to plead with him three times before her daughter is healed.

Firstly she cries out:-

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

After Jesus rejects her for the first time she kneels before him and says:-

"Lord Help me".

And when Jesus rejects her again she replies:-

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Some biblical commentators say that the length of time it took Jesus to help this woman points to his humanity. They say he may have been tired, or he may have not wanted to deal with her. They may think this, because in another example of Jesus healing a woman, she only had to touch his cloak, and she was healed instantly.

I'd like to think it is more about Jesus trying to make a point. The Jews were God's chosen people and Jesus himself was a Jew. But Jesus has come, not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. All those who have faith in him have access to him.

I think he wanted to emphasize the importance of Faith.

The Canaanite woman showed great faith and as followers of Jesus we too are called to show great faith. We are called to put all of our faith, all of our hope, and all of our trust in Jesus.

Same from Paul

In the reading we've heard from Paul's letter to the Romans we also hear the message that salvation has come through the nation of Israel (the Jews), but that Gentiles too have access through faith.

Paul uses the image of God as the olive tree. The original branches on the tree were that of the nation of Israel. It was through lack of faith, lack of belief in Jesus that the branches of Israel were broken off the tree. Conversely it is through faith that gentiles, wild olive branches, can be grafted into the tree.

Paul is also keen to point out that the newly grafted in branches can still be cut off if they become arrogant in their relationship with God. And there is also still hope for those branches that have been broken off. If they do not persist in unbelief they can be grafted in again.

So God doesn't really rule anyone in or out of his kingdom. It is through our faith, our belief in Jesus, that our relationship with God is sealed and we become part of God's Family.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude with an other image of Jesus, from a famous painting based on Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

The painting is of Jesus standing with a lantern in his hand, knocking on a door. The door is overgrown with vines, and appears quite shut. Someone looked at the painting and remarked to the artist, you've made a mistake there's no handle on the door for Jesus to get in. The artist corrected the enquirer and told them he had intentionally painted the door without a handle on the outside. He told them that the handle was on the inside. Jesus loves us too much to force us into anything. It's up to us to open the door, and invite him into our lives. And when we do, we can be sure that he will come.

How do we react to Jesus when he knocks on the door of our lives?

Do we open it a little bit and look out at Jesus.

Or do we react like the Canaanite woman did.

Do we fling open the door and drag Jesus into our lives, so that we can experience the transformation God offers us.

Amen.