

Matthew 15

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.'

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.'

The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment.

What does God want for us.

Andy Crouch has written an important book called the Strong and Weak and in it he says what God really wants is our flourishing.

He then helpfully defines what he means,

'.....flourishing means to be 'magnificently oneself'.

God wants you to be you and me to be me and for all of us to fulfil our God given potential. And we're different. And here's the thing.

Because God is at work in this parish, we will be joined by others and they will different still.

That's the plan. In his time and in his grace, as they have down the centuries, more people are going to come to know Jesus in the Itchen valley

Those who today don't know him.

I've been meeting two sorts of people.

People who come to and are part of our wonderful church.

And people who are very sure they don't come.

"You need to know I don't come"

Someone said that to me at a funeral wake on Friday and I replied with a smile.

'Not yet' and they laughed.

A good few folk yesterday at a wedding in the parish also told me that they don't come.

You may remember the moment earlier in Matthew when the children come to Jesus:

'You have to learn to welcome this child.

Says Jesus

He's holding the child in his arms

If all you know is how to scrap your way to first place you'll forget to care for this child and my kingdom is all about this vulnerable one.

Bring them to me

The message translation says the disciples tried to shoo the children off.

The Greek word for welcome that Jesus uses here conjures up an image of making space for a visitor. It points to a kind of hospitality that is the very antithesis of competition.

The life of Jesus points to a life of hospitality and not a life of competition.

This is a wonderful incident in Jesus ministry that again speaks of that.

It's an absolute cross roads moment. A moment of invitation.

Matt 10 v 15 Jesus tells the disciples

'Do not go among the Gentiles'

And here we get to Matthew 28 Jesus says 'Go and make disciples of all the Gentiles'

This is a catalyst moment of change that happens and happens in three acts

A cry

A request

A transformation.

1. A cry.

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.'

I don't know that there is anything harder for a parent than to see their child suffer. At this time there were no GP's or A and E's. This dear woman is utterly desperate and she comes to Jesus because she'd heard about him.

By this time in Jesus's ministry the word was getting out that people were being healed

Here again the disciples try to shoo this Canaanite woman away.

But this woman we are told cries out - she knows her need.

I had a season when a lady would ring our Vicarage door bell early in the morning. It went off for weeks.

Physical pain - but also emotional. She had a difficult story. Rachel and I would calm her down, invite her in and make her tea and together we helped her through that season.

She knew what it was to cry out.

I don't know if you've ever cried out before Jesus.

Another friend has also found himself crying out to Jesus.

He got news last year following his daughter in laws 20 week scan that medically there was no hope for his unborn grand child. The baby had no external limbs and so much else that was wrong that the recommendation was to terminate the pregnancy.

He cried out.

My dear friend is in his early 80's. In a morning service about six months ago he described how upon that news he lay down on his face on the carpet in his home and cried out before the Lord day and night.

Heal this child he pleaded . And the church set about praying with him for this baby in the womb.

Miraculously each scan gave him a little bit of hope. Every two weeks things got a bit better.

So he cried some more.

In December the baby was born - fully well

Notice the woman calls Jesus 'Son of David' so she knew about something enough to know a title he'd being afforded.

"Have mercy on me."

She'd run out of her own resources. That's usually when we end up on our face before Jesus.

2. A request

You'll recall that Jesus was first called to the Jews. At this point he again needs to be alone and he has headed north to Phoenicia which is Gentile territory. Out of the land of the familiar and into the territory of the unclean.

His first calling was

‘To the lost sheep of Israel.’

And they wholesale reject him and eventually want to kill him

The encounter with this Gentile women is an about turn moment.

I can remember reading Francis Chan’s book ‘Crazy love’ which changed how I relate to those who are broken and different and vulnerable.

One particular line when reading it hit my heart.

‘Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter’

As the Canaanite woman is before him it says.

V 23 Jesus did not answer a word.

Sometimes it’s good not to say anything.

Jesus takes a moment.

2. On to the request

He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.’

The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said.

There you have it.

The request.

Lord help me.

Sometimes that’s really all you can muster.

One of my roles as your shepherd is to teach you to pray.

Do you remember lady bird books.

1a I. Prayer.

“Lord help me”.

That’s the one times table of prayer.

You can pray on any occasion.

Lord help me

3. The transformation.

That of course only part of it.

After his moment being wordless and looking at the women:

He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

'Yes it is, Lord, 'she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

If you haven't yet watched 'The Chosen' I encourage you to do so. It's amazing.

What's comes across is the humour of Jesus. The little twinkle he so often has in his dealings with people and his disciples.

This is one of those moments.

I think it's a soliloquy. Jesus speaking his private thoughts out loud.

Gentiles were considered no better than 'dogs' by Jews.

The word Jesus uses though is not the word for wild dogs it the word for puppies.

It's a humorous play on words through which he unleashing the gospel to the world.

And her daughter is healed.

Of course, we too are the Gentile puppies. And we're invited to the table.

Back to where I began - this is what we learn from this encounter. - the flourishing of the vulnerable depends on the vulnerability of the flourishing.

If the weak and the wounded and the sick and the sore are going to flourish once again, it will be because those of us who are flourishing decide to take their vulnerability upon ourselves.

Throwing the poor a few
crumbs now and then won't cut it.

God's vision is for a bunch of strong people who become vulnerable themselves made possible by the cross where Jesus the only sting one broke himself for us . As a result of grace- we can stop trying to win and instead go and stand with the losers, the left out and the left behind.

We kneel with the Canaanite woman at Jesus feet simply say 'Lord have mercy.'