

Sermon 16 August 2020 Trinity 10, Isaiah 56:1, 6-8, Matthew 15: 21-28

Lord God, help us be more like you and love all people, even those who are very different from us. Amen

Oh please just give me 5 minutes peace on my own!

- Anyone with a young child, someone dependent on you, or an overflowing inbox or constant phone ringing from your boss will easily identify with this feeling.
- Jesus may well have been reacting like this in our Gospel reading today and rather than pour yourself a stiff drink, lock yourself in the loo for half an hour or pull the plug on the computer and bury your mobile under the sofa, perhaps we should take a leaf out of Jesus' book and step back and ask God's help to calm and strengthen us when the world presses in on us!
- Jesus had just fed 5000 people- we heard that gospel reading a couple of Sundays ago. Directly after that event, we are told Jesus went up the mountain alone to pray -he had to get away from the clamouring crowds who so desperately needed him, to find 5 minutes peace, draw renewed strength from God his Father and to seek further guidance.
- But a few days later- in today's reading - It seems that Jesus needed even greater space from the enthusiastic Jews plus time to prepare his disciples for the coming rigours of the journey to Jerusalem and his death, so he decides to go further away than just up a mountain- he and his disciples go to Gentile country - the land near the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon - this was the only time Jesus left Jewish land and travelled around in a non-Jewish (that is Gentile) area .
- But even there he is pursued by someone desperate for his help- a Canaanite woman- a long-standing pagan enemy of the Jews begs for help- she knows who Jesus is and respectfully uses the term Son of David at the start of her plea for healing for her very ill daughter
- But Jesus won't be brow-beaten into granting her request straight away.. He can see she has a great need - and he is perfectly able to heal her daughter (as he does later) but maybe he wants to see if the woman will engage with him, will come closer to God and discover more about God's love, which he as the Son of God can give to her,
- Jesus's response is shocking to us today (v22) "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*"
- That sounds rather racist doesn't it - "well I'll talk to people from my own background but not even engage with someone different".
- But surely we are taught that
- **God loves all people and Jesus is God in human form** so what's going on?
- consider 2 points :
- 1 Perhaps Jesus is being deliberately provocative because he wants her to engage and not just accept his gift of healing without any transformation in her emerging faith
- 2 It's not just what you say, it's how you say it, as I know myself!
- We have the words that Jesus says , but what is his tone?
- He could be like the disciples (who are very irritated by the woman : v 23 *his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.'*) and almost spit the words out aggressively - which he might have done if he was trying to put an end to the conversation - but that's not what Jesus wants. Jesus wants to transform people - that includes you and me in our lives too - don't forget, Jesus is always with us, **God loves all people** and will always encourage our tentative moves towards him and never push us away.
- Did Jesus say " I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"
- In
 - a) an aggressive voice
 - b) a resigned voice
 - c) a gentle, apologetic voice - "I'm really sorry but my mission is not to your people"
 - d) a neutral voice - interested to see how the conversation develops and how the woman responds
- I don't think Jesus was ever aggressive (frustrated sometimes yes, but not aggressive)- how could he be if he was the human form of God and God is love? so I think the answer would mainly have been d) with a bit of b) and c)
- because she is not deflected by first his silence and then his answer - instead she then kneels before him and prays for Jesus's help. She becomes humble and Jesus responds by continuing to engage but continuing to see if she will move even further forward towards God by daring to *insult* her!

v26 "He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'". Clearly referring to her Gentile lowly position being like a dog under the master's table

But she is ready with an answer and continues to ask for compassion and love - and remember she is not asking Jesus for money or a rise in social status - she is asking for her child (not even herself) to be healed- she is purely asking for love - so how can Jesus ultimately refuse her?

He grants her her request and I feel he is smiling broadly when he says

'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' (v28)

- The woman has had her prayer request answered because she has humbled herself, engaged with Jesus and let God's love transform the encounter - I would suggest that Jesus too has benefitted because both have felt God's loving power at that moment - the woman has developed in faith and Jesus has been renewed again by power of his Father in heaven- neither of their lives will be quite the same again.

God loves all people.

- His plan is for all people to be transformed and turn towards him and his love, it's now not just for his chosen people, God's love is for everyone: Jew and Gentile..... You and me - and when we act through God's love, we too are transformed, maybe without really realising what is happening, we come closer to God and help to build His kingdom here on earth - we are acting out our Christian faith to go and make disciples of all nations- we can all do this!

As it says in Isaiah v8 "I will gather others to them besides those already gathered" - the Canaanite woman seems to have become one of these "others".

- Are we as open as Jesus to listening to and helping people who are not outwardly the same as us?

If we are white, do we really care if there is prejudice against black people, Asian people, anyone from an ethnic minority or a different country?

If we are non-white, how do we regard white people? As oppressors or friends?

God loves all people and Jesus calls us to do the same.

What was your reaction when you heard it took a black footballer, Marcus Rashford, originally from a poorer (but we hear devoutly Christian) household to overturn the government's original decision not to provide food during the summer holidays for the most vulnerable children in this country, one of the richest in the world?

- As a Christian were you shocked that it was necessary to challenge our government to care for the poorest?
- Were you delighted by his action and that Marcus was so humble in interviews about using his status to help the poor?
- Or did you think "huh, media hype, a good story, but the government can't think of everything in this pandemic can it" rather than stopping for a few minutes to think about the deeper meaning behind what had just happened and not wanting it to let it challenge your previous ideas....
- but surely as followers of Jesus we need to let his Holy Spirit transform us to also stand up for the poor, the vulnerable and use our influence, whatever that might be, to make a difference to the world around us, rather than just shrug our shoulders and say "well it's not up to me"
- I can see parallels with the Canaanite woman, a Gentile, hated by the Jews and Marcus Rashford, a black man from an underprivileged minority in white Britain.
- Both were asking for something fundamental (healing and food) not for themselves but for a child or children - in any society children need support from adults, they are dependants
- Both were courageous in asking for help and went to the top person - the person who they knew could change the situation if they wanted to
- Both, I suggest were guided by love - and therefore God must have had a hand in the outcome
- Obviously Jesus was God in human form.
- The British Prime Minister is certainly not God, but it seems to me that God was with and guiding Marcus Rashford to convince the Prime Minister to change his policy and provide food to the poorest children and thereby raising others awareness of poverty in our country as well
- **God loves all people and Jesus calls us to do the same.**

If we are comfortably off, do we really care that there is grinding poverty in this country, one of the richest in the world and that the dice seems to be loaded against those with least to start with?

God loves all people and Jesus calls us to do the same.

How can we respond to this call this week ?

What can we each do to become more Christlike?

Will we- you and me- , at the very least have a conversation with someone who does not have the same skin colour as us or the same educational background as us or the same ideas on how we can make God's world a better and fairer place for all people?..... and let Jesus transform both of us in the process because

our God loves all people and Jesus calls us to do the same

Amen

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