

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman  
Rev. Susan Pickering**

Gathering of the People of God

**Organ Prelude**

**Welcome & Notices**

**Centring Prayer**

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,  
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

**Processional Hymn:                      Come as you Are TiS 693**

**Light the Christ Candle**

We light this candle as a reminder that Christ is the light of the world.

**Call to Worship**

In the beauty of this moment  
**We come as we are.**

In the presence of your Spirit  
**We gather together**

In the communion of your people  
In the company of all creation  
**We gather to worship you, O God.**

**Acknowledgment of Country**

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that is in them.

**This land is Holy Ground**

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians,  
the Turrbal and Jagera people, elders, past, present and emerging  
**We honour them for their custodianship of the land,  
on which we gather today.**

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

**Introit**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession**

Creator God,  
you created a world of beauty and diversity.  
A world to feed us and a world to care for.  
We give thanks that you chose to enter into humanity  
in the person of Jesus of Nazareth,  
Who came to call all people to a new and alternative way of living.

As the light of the sun creates shadows upon the earth,  
So too does the light of your glory reveal the shadows within each of us,  
And so we bring the shadowy places of our lives before you.  
Jesus came open to challenge and transformation  
Sweeping away centuries of prejudice and legalism.  
We confess that the systems and structures of our world fail to be as inclusive as  
you, so much division and exclusion.  
People forced to live on the fringes of community and society,  
People walk with their heads hanging in shame that is not theirs.

We confess that the seduction of the worlds treasures draw us in,  
In a world obsessed with power, profit, what is success and what's not - we so  
often fail to see the narrow path that we are called to walk on.

We know in our hearts the demands of discipleship demands,  
And so it is right to confess that the journey from heart to eyes and hands and feet  
can be long and difficult and sometime easier to avoid.

Forgive us, God,  
Send your Spirit to weave through your people,  
Strengthen us, where we are weak make us strong to withstand the seduction of  
the world.  
May we be as merciful, as open  
As inclusive and as compassionate as you,  
May we be open to the transformation that is offered in Christ.  
In the name of the One who walked the hard journey to the Cross,  
Never compromising your vision. Amen

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

**Words of Assurance**

We rejoice in the good news that God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. So we give thanks, there is no condemnation and we are a forgiven, free and liberated people.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Doxology: Praise God (TiS 768)**

Service of the Word

**Readings**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading**                      **Genesis 45:1 - 15**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading**                      **Matthew 15:10 -28**

This is the Living Word  
**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Anthem**

**Message**

Many of us will be familiar with our gospel reading for today, and as with every other reading, we need to keep in mind the larger context, we recently had the miracle of the feeding of the 5000+, walking on water and the reading that immediately precedes today's reading is Jesus teaching about the misuse of tradition and lessons on things that defile a person.

Today we have Jesus entering Tyre and Sidon, he's in Gentile territory and it's here that he encounters an unnamed Canaanite woman, an outsider, a desperate woman, a mum, seeking healing for her daughter. Using the words of tradition<sup>1</sup> and a title of respect she comes at Jesus shouting. 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'<sup>2</sup> Jesus ignores her, nothing, silence! It seems that she's completely undeterred by Jesus' decision to ignore her, the disciples on the other hand seem to be getting a bit fed up and annoyed with the woman's badgering and so they urge Jesus to turn her away, pretty much as they did at the feeding of the 5000+. She's persistent and finally Jesus makes the decision to respond by basically telling her to take a hike, he 'was sent only to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wainwright in An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 15:22

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ What the? Where is the generous heart of God? The God who so loved the world?

Regardless this woman is still not deterred, she kneels before Jesus and basically begs. Jesus’ response, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ This response from Jesus, again a far cry from one that reflects the generous heart of God, is one of contempt, the term dog was a derogatory term for Gentiles. Still not deterred, refusing to be shamed, she acts shamelessly, she engages, she accepts the designation of dog and continues to debate, she insists on her point. Finally, Jesus humbly accepts the challenge and declares, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.’ (This a far cry from his word to Peter last week when he says you of little faith)

Anyhoo, Jesus has just finished teaching the disciples that it is that which comes from the heart that defiles, so I can’t help but ask who is this? Where is Jesus, the man who reveals the nature and character of God - the character of inclusion, acceptance and the bringing about of justice for all?<sup>3</sup> Well, I’ve heard the suggestion that Jesus was perhaps testing the disciples, to see if they had learned anything, that he’s testing the woman because he recognised her strength of character<sup>4</sup> and that it was just a playful exchange.<sup>5</sup> For me these suggestions become an attempt to rescue Jesus, which is a bit concerning, because if we have to rescue Jesus what hope do we have?

I’d like to suggest another possibility. The reality is that, as Wright puts it, this woman is the wrong gender, wrong race and wrong culture,<sup>6</sup> this woman was basically non-existent to the Jewish men passing through. While we have very little trouble accepting the divinity of Jesus, within our limited human understanding, in this account we are confronted by the fact that here, Jesus appears to be scandalously human. There is no escape from the fact that he was a 1st century Jewish male, with male privileges.<sup>7</sup> In his insulting response perhaps we are hearing the discrimination and oppression experienced by the Gentiles from the Jews.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fiorenza

<sup>4</sup> Dykstra on [sojo.net](http://sojo.net)

<sup>5</sup> Borsch in Feasting on the Gospels

<sup>6</sup> Wright

<sup>7</sup> Choo in Preaching the Word

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

I think the driver behind rescue attempts are a bid to try and make this account a bit more comfortable, you know nice! The reality is that it's not nice but it is certainly powerful. Jesus, fully human, flesh and blood a first century Jewish Man lived in a particular time, place and culture - that was one of patriarchy, male privilege and power. He is greeted by a foreign unnamed woman, that appears to be unescorted and definitely brazen, she takes initiative, her daughter is tormented by a demon and she not only recognises Jesus as the one able to cast the demon from her daughter, but she believes. In her actions she breaks purity and social codes approaching not one man, but a group of men how very dare she? This woman offers her prayer to Jesus, she honours him, but she's feisty and determined to be heard, she has a voice and she is not afraid to use it.

This woman has thrown all caution to the wind, she dared to debate with Jesus, who at this time understood his mission to be only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She moves closer and kneels and then calls for Easter, she pushes against the boundaries and the barriers, she calls for a transformation of heart, she calls for things to be made new.

Jesus doesn't slink away, or continue to argue his understanding of his mission. Jesus is unashamed of correction and open to challenge, not by a mentor, a peer or even someone who is considered equal. Jesus is converted, if you like, transformed by the challenge of a gentile woman who he ignored and insulted. This woman recognised her worth, she may be a gentile, a foreigner, a woman but she has worth in the eyes of God, and whether it be by the grace of God that she knew her worth we will never know, but she knew it.

I think the power in this account, the challenge to each of us is to remember that we meet people everyday whose lives may well be different; different socio-economic status, physical or intellectual ability, people who hold different values and religious beliefs - this account is a powerful reminder that God can work through all people. Many people are denied their worth based on difference, their dignity is stripped from them because of difference. We, like Jesus in the account, hold privilege and often it's easier to ignore and dismiss, but in our call to discipleship, to be the hands, feet, heart and voice of Christ in the world now we need to listen for the voices of the woman, the woman who opens Jesus mind to the new vision of the kingdom of God, the woman who transforms tradition.

We are called to stand on the edge, to push back against boundaries that try to prevent people accessing the grace and love of God, we are called to stand in solidarity with the marginalised until all are free. This woman invites us to be transformed, we don't have to insist on Easter because we live in the after event,

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

however, we do need to continue to call for inclusion, for the kingdom to come on earth as in heaven.

**Prayer:**

Blessed be You Transforming God, We pray that you grant us to hear the cries of the poor, the broken and the oppressed. Send your Spirit to fill us with compassion, that our hearts may be changed in our encounter with others. Let us not be ashamed, let us not be afraid, let us be renewed and restored to work for transformation. Amen

**Hymn: Beauty for Brokenness (TiS 690)**

**Prayers for the People:**

As a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the prayer;

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

**Peace**

**Sending Forth the People of God**

**Hymn: Now Thank We All our God**

**Sending Out & Blessing**

Let us go out in the world,  
Daring to live life on the edge always pushing boundaries.  
Let us be prepared to continue to call for inclusion,  
Open to being challenged and transformed.

May the blessing of God, in whose image we are created, greet us in the stranger  
May the blessing of Christ, who reveals the fullness of God, be a model for our lives  
and may the blessing of the Holy Spirit, Woman Wisdom, gently birth within us the  
desire to be inclusive of all.

**Matthew 15:21 - 28 Canaanite Woman**  
**Rev. Susan Pickering**

**Threefold Amen**

**Postlude**

**Sources**

NRSV Holy Bible

Matthew - Stanley Hauerwas

Feasting on the Gospels - Edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson

An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion - Vol 9

The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium - Walter Wink

Matthew for Everyone - Tom Wright

In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins -

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Preaching the Word - [sojo.net](http://sojo.net)