

“Crumby Theology” - Matthew 15.21-28 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

A desperate woman comes seeking Jesus. She has a felt need – her daughter is suffering. But the disciples see this woman only as a distraction and an annoyance. Jesus sees her as one who is outside of his job description, but she implores him to expand that vision and mission. He then, I believe, sees her in a new light. Jesus, at first, seems to see her as a dog – less than a Jew; less than human. But her crumby theology would remind us that even the dogs get the crumbs from the table!

Later on, Peter will have a vision of a sheet filled with animals coming down from heaven and God calling all animals clean in Acts 10. Peter does not go right out and eat bacon defying the kosher food laws. Instead he sees and interprets that he is to go minister to the Gentiles, people who were seen as unclean, filthy dogs. This vision shows him that in the eyes of God that, “those people” are clean as well. This is the turning point that will define Peter’s mission for the rest of his life. This might be a turning point in your life, who are “those people” for you? What if instead of a Canaanite woman today we rewrote this story, maybe she would be an illegal immigrant or black or transgender or Neo-Nazi...! The question is who are “those people” for you? Fill in the blank for yourself and your prejudice. Now you can feel the underlying tension in this story and the importance of what happened here!

I believe that Jesus had a God-given mission, and some of you might have a favorite Bible verse that describes that – *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life. God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.* (John 3:16-17) John (or a follower of John) writing maybe 50 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection may have understood it that way then, as the church grew in the Gentile world. But early on I do not see that, and especially not here in this story, or Jesus would have just quoted it to this woman about God loving all the world including her and that he came to save her and her daughter – a healing miracle would happen – end of story. But Jesus seems to turn her away as not being within his understanding of his job description – according to verse 24, he came here for “*the lost sheep of the people of Israel*” period. I think Jesus honed his discernment for his mission or job description in the 40 days in the wilderness. In those three temptations his ministry and mission would not be primarily a feeding mission, a healing mission, or a world-wide mission as the temptations came to him to claim any of those. No, instead Jesus’ mission would be to seek the least, the last, and the lost people of Israel.

Everyone is gifted for mission and ministry, so what is your passion and mission? How far has it led you; how far might it lead you? What have you done for Jesus lately? Together might we discern what mission God has for us as a church today and into the future? What an exciting time to be in ministry!

For me in my first month here, my focus has been: It’s not about the Mission, it’s about the Missin’? Who’s Missing? Look around today, though we are all here, who is still missing? The Mission is about the Missing – did you hear him in verse 24? *Jesus replied, “I’ve been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.”* Later in this gospel he will put it this way showing how much he values the Missing in a parable about a one-in-a-hundred missing sheep! *What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the*

ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search for the one that wandered off? If he finds it, I assure you that he is happier about having that one sheep than about the ninety-nine who didn't wander off. In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn't want to lose one of these little ones. (Matthew 18.12-14)

It is not that we have one lost sheep, but through Covid and the last few years we have lost touch with over 100 sheep! So, a couple weeks ago I prayed for each of them and wrote invitations to them to come back to church today, or to let me know if they had joined another church. This week I prayed over our new pictorial directory and emailed or wrote to those I haven't met yet and likewise invited them to come back today. And with the start of Sunday school this morning, we reached out to children, youth and families. Welcome back all of you!

We are now called to now think outside the box. Who is out there and what are their felt needs? In the coming year how might we get to know them and help to address their needs and welcome them into a loving community of faith and into a relationship with Jesus? When I went to the church at Rome, NY I discovered two historic banners in their large meeting room. One noted that over a hundred years before they had 2 women's groups. They both were mission minded, but one banner noted they had a "Home Mission Society" and the other banner noted they also had a "Foreign Missionary Society." Today let me ask, "What is your Mission?"

As a church, I think we are called to do both mission here and far away, the Canaanite woman would agree! We are to care for the lost sheep here, but also the lost sheep anywhere and everywhere. Who does not have a mission yet? How can we help you find one? Last week we restarted collecting food for the Food Pantry. What other ministries here might we support? A couple weeks ago I heard from a missionary friend, Belinda Forbes a dentist serving in Nicaragua, that she would be coming to the churches I served in WV as they had been financially supporting her over the past 3 years while I was there. When they schedule her visit towards the end of the month, I want to go see her and hear from her as she shares her story with them. But I would also love to hear from you and the mission God has given you! Alleluia and Amen.

Help Me Be Open to Your Call

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 8/8/23

Help me be open to your call,
Lord, as you call my name.
The saints before me gave their all,
May I now do the same.

Lord, when I put you in a box,
Limiting what I'll do.
Show me what wonders love unlocks,
When by faith I serve you.

Jesus had limited his role,
Just to Israel's lost sheep.
A foreign woman touched his soul,
Thus the church took a leap.

Open my eyes that I might see,
What is upon your heart.
What you wish to reveal to me,
That I might do my part.