

Pentecost 15 (Lectionary 23) Year B September 5, 2021

Mark 7:24-37

Epiphany, Winnipeg

1 This Syrophenician woman. She wouldn't let Jesus go, you know. Her daughter was sick, and she'd run out of options. No doctor could help, the local pharmacist couldn't do anything, she might have prayed and prayed, but her daughter still had this unclean Spirit, something gone wrong, something that just didn't belong, maybe something she couldn't explain. So she hears about someone new in town who has travelled fifty kilometres from his home place. Yes, that's how far her town, Tyre, is from the town where Jesus lives. He's travelled fifty kilometres. She hears that he's in that house over there, and she hears that nobody's supposed to know, and she hears that he wants to be alone – he's travelled fifty kilometres to be alone, right? He really wants to be alone.

But she goes to the house anyway, and she goes in anyway, and she bows at his feet and says, "My daughter's got this unclean Spirit, this something that's eating away at her from the inside. Get rid of that Spirit. Get rid of it. Throw out that Spirit. Throw it out." She asks and asks and asks and it doesn't matter to her that Jesus doesn't want anyone to know he's there. She knows that all she can do is tell Jesus about her daughter.

Then Jesus says what we all wish Jesus had never said: "Feed the children first; it's not fair to throw the children's food to dogs."

Did he really just say that? Did he really just say something that sounds an awful lot like he just said that her child is like a dog? Because he's a Jew and she's a Gentile? Because he's chosen and she's not? Because he's tired and he's got a short fuse that day?

Did he really just say that?

But she wouldn't let Jesus go, you know. Her daughter was sick, and she'd run out of options. No doctor could help, the local healer couldn't do anything, she might have prayed and prayed, but her daughter still had this unclean Spirit, this something that was sapping her life. She goes to the place where Jesus is, she asks this question of this traveller who they said could do something, and then Jesus says that, but she says, "Fair enough, Sir, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs under the table." And then something changes, and it's like a switch goes on, and Jesus says, "Because of that word, the demon has left your daughter. She's OK."

She just wouldn't let Jesus go, you know.

And then maybe...he changed his mind. Or he learned from her. He went into that house and he didn't want anyone to know but then she came through the door, and soon the house had grown, and soon there was room for this woman who loves her daughter, and there was room for her love and her care and her pleading, and there was room for her daughter who is not a dog, and there was room for healing and for being made free...and there was room for more, and there was room for all. The house grew. And if there was in fact a dog, a real four-legged dog snoozing over in the corner of the house, there was room for him too.

She wouldn't let Jesus go.

Now here's something to ponder about Jesus. Jesus had to learn things. I think we get so enthused about Jesus who heals people, or Jesus who has the questions that stump the scholars, or Jesus who just naturally has all this love for everyone around him. We hold him up like that and sort of think that he arrived as a fully-formed package, with all his teaching and his ability and personality just there from the start, waiting to burst out into plain sight some day. But Jesus had to

learn things. Like anyone does. If he were a child today we might say he had to learn how to walk, and he had to learn how to hold his fork the right way and learn to read and hold a pencil and learn how to log on to remember his password, and he had to learn how to take turns and share. Just like anyone. Jesus grew, and learned things. He was Mary and Joseph's boy, and he learned how to live in their house, and how to become a youth and an adult in the town where he lived. He had to learn his religious tradition, all these things that his people had learned and lived for centuries.

Jesus had to learn things. You know. Like we all do. When we're five or eleven or twenty-six or thirty something or 50 or 90. We learn all along the way.

This woman wouldn't let go. And Jesus learns something about who he is called to be. What this woman says flips a switch somewhere and maybe Jesus remembers something he's learned about loving his neighbour as himself, and he sees that that means that even this Gentile woman and her daughter have a place at the table and not under it. And when Jesus learns that, when he notices, then the house grows to include someone new.

This woman is like everyone who's had to get someone to notice. She's like the young woman who knew she wanted to be a pastor but everyone said women can't do that, but she kept on and the house grew because she kept on. She's like the young man who just wanted it to be OK for him to spend his life with the man he loves, and he kept on and so many more kept on and finally the house grew. She's like anyone who's been a slave and has kept on saying that's got to change, she's like all those women and men who have kept saying that indigenous women disappear and are murdered so much more often, and they won't let go and now and then someone listens and the house grows. She's like

anyone who has said, “What’s happening is not right,” and has had to say it again and again and again.

And now...it’s not like Jesus has to learn all this again. But *we* do. Along political lines or along social lines or racial lines or well-behaved lines we can be the ones who say, “This food is only for us on this side and not for you.” Somewhere along the line I think we all run into a point where we want to say that the household shouldn’t include those people, or the good things we have should be for us at our table and not for those others who come through the door. You know what your limits are. I think we all do, when we’re honest. We know where we’d like to close the door, and who we’d rather keep on the other side.

But we have also seen and heard – maybe we’ve all kind of had our own persistent Syrophenician woman who keeps on with the good news until we hear it – We have seen and heard that when Jesus is in the house the house gets bigger. When Jesus is in the house the house grows and there is room for the persistent woman and her struggling daughter, there’s room for the ones who are heard and the ones who will not hear, there is room for the ones who are afraid to speak and the ones who won’t stop talking. There is room for those who cannot see and there’s room for those who refuse to see. There is room for the ones in need of healing and for the ones who lovingly carry them along. There’s room for everyone we might call good and for everyone we will only see as bad.

The house always gets bigger. The stone rolls away and Jesus steps out of the tomb and into the house – the house of the whole creation. And because of this news, this word...all in the house are made well. AMEN.