

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
SEND HER AWAY!
Matthew 15: 21-28
August 14, 2011
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Biblical history periodically shows two opposing movements at work. One is a tendency toward a more exclusive understanding of God's favor, creating more restrictive views. The other is a move toward a more inclusive understanding. In the scriptures it is clear that the universal love of God triumphs. It was Jesus himself who broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. This exchange, on Gentile soil, both shows the typical Jewish attitude toward Gentiles and Jesus' ignoring of that barrier in commending the woman for her faith.

Back when I was in high school, the Kingston Trio was a very popular group. They had a little song that actually describes some of the turmoil in the world today. It went like this:

**They're rioting in Africa. They're starving in Spain.
There's hurricanes in Florida and Texas needs rain.
The whole world is festering with unhappy souls.
The French hate the Germans; the Germans hate the Poles.
Italians hate Yugoslavs; South Africans hate the Dutch,
And I don't like anybody very much.
But we can be tranquil and thankful and proud,
For man's been endowed with a mushroom shaped cloud.
And we know for certain that some lovely day
Someone will set the spark off and we will all be blown away.
They're rioting in Africa. There's strife in Iran.
What nature doesn't do to us, will be done by our fellow man. (1)**

It's satire, but it also is a pretty apt description of the human condition. Situations change, but human nature doesn't. There is something about us all that causes us to brand people who are not like us as unlikable, inferior, undeserving--to

reject them and shut them out--even to go to war with them. So it was in Galilee 2100 years ago.

Matthew tells us that ***“leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.”*** It was a land occupied by people of various religions. None of these religions was more detestable to the Jews than the Canaanite religion. Matthew tells us that a Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to Jesus crying out to him, ***“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”***

It was nothing new, of course for someone to come to Jesus crying out for healing--either for themselves or for someone they loved. News was traveling fast about Jesus' ability to heal. The feeding of the 5000 came about because of the crush of people coming to the Master to be healed. But a Canaanite? They were ***“religious scum”*** as far as the Jews were concerned.

And it didn't help that this particular Canaanite was a woman. In the time of Jesus women had very little status in Jewish society. They were considered the property of their husbands or their fathers. They had very few rights. This inferior status was reinforced by the religious customs of the day.

As a matter of fact, there was a literal wall in the Temple that separated Jewish women from Jewish men. What kind of walls do churches use to separate people today? Just ask members of the GLBT community. This is not the way to honor God. It is a way to say to people, you are excluded; you are not loved, you are not special. In that culture men were special; women were not. Is that still true in our culture today? Just as a member of the GLBT community.

When this woman approached Jesus it even caught him off guard. Matthews tells us that when this woman confronted Jesus with her appeal to heal her daughter, ***“Jesus did not answer a word.”*** It was not kosher for a Jewish man to interact with a strange woman, particularly a Canaanite woman. So Jesus has to decide, what Do I do? While processing this in his mind, he first does not answer her. So his disciples assume that she is troubling the Master. ***“Send her away,”*** they urge him, ***“for she keeps crying out after us.”*** He answers quietly, ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”***

Although uncertain about how to deal with her, this woman's situation and her earnest plea forced Jesus to enlarge his view of the kingdom of God beyond the Jewish community.

She woman came and knelt before him and said; ***“Lord, help me!”*** And Jesus replied with words from that more exclusive and restrictive view of understanding of God’s favor. It is disturbing even now to hear words that have troubled true Christians through the ages. ***“It is not right,”*** Jesus said, ***“to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”***

Prejudice is so pervasive! It is hurtful in any culture to use a derogatory term for another human being. And the woman in this story has a lesson for Jesus. She said, ***“Yes it is, Lord. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”*** What a wonderful response! She was not going to live below her privilege as a child of God.

She knew who she was. I might be a Canaanite. I might be a woman, but I have a place in my father’s house. I have rights as a child of God. And besides, she knew she was in the presence of the messiah. If she knew anything at all about the messianic age prophesied by the Jews, she knew it would usher in an age of peace and justice. If Jesus was who he said he was, he could not turn her away. It would be unjust. And, of course, he didn’t. Jesus said to her, ***“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”*** And her daughter was healed at that moment.

“Send her away,” the disciples had urged. She’s not of the right faith. Send her away. She’s a woman. Send her way. She’s a nuisance. But this woman knew what many people in the church must come to understand. Thanks to the grace of God, everyone deserves his or her place in the sun. It doesn’t matter who they are.

Prejudice comes in many forms. It can be racial, it can be economic, it can have to do with gender. Prejudice displays itself in many ways. It can keep us from seeing other people and their needs. Prejudice can cause us to ignore and even avoid people who are not like us. **However, understand this: when the Kingdom comes all prejudice will be expelled.** The Canaanite woman saw that. She knew that Jesus was the Messiah and she knew that he could not turn her away.

If you want an inclusive church that embraces spirituality, diversity, service and unconditional acceptance, I would love to be your pastor, because this is your church.