

Sermon for 16th August in St Paul's, Sale. Rev Jenny Wicking.

The gospel's reading today from Matthew 15:21-28 of the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman some theologians would say is the critical turning point of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is challenged by this woman who will not say no for an answer.

In Yarram we have been asking- "Who do you say Jesus is?" In the reading of Matthew Jesus understanding of his ministry to "just to the lost sheep of house of Israel" is challenged as he encounters this woman a gentile who openly expresses who he is; "the messianic Son of David" her faith greater than some in the house of Israel. The other turning point in this encounter was Jesus perception of who this woman was following him and pestering him as she shouted out to him.

But first let us set the scene. Jesus has withdrawn from the hostile Jews Leader having challenged them of their failure to see Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus and his disciples are now in gentile territory -and a desperate cry from a Canaanite woman interrupts their journey. She is not only a gentile but a Canaanite woman – lowest of the lowest – a dog- fuel for the fires of hell. And she approaches Jesus and ask for what seemly is impossible – healing for her daughter. Her desperate pleas for her demon possessed daughter to be freed from her affliction – drives her to take the risk and approach Jesus.

One can only imagine why she even thought that Jesus who listen to her or even heal her daughter. Had she heard or saw Jesus as he spoke out against the leaders? Maybe she had seen or heard of many being healed or feed as Jesus travelled throughout Galilee. Whatever the reason a glimmer of hope had been raised and she dared to believe maybe he will heal her daughter. She follows him crying out "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David my daughter is tormented by a demon. In her plea she acknowledges Jesus as Lord – she also knows her place in pleads for mercy.

Then we read the unthinkable Jesus does not respond to her – her cries are beginning to get on the nerves of the disciples and they urge Jesus to send her away as her shouting in not ceasing. They are asking Jesus to grant her request.

Jesus responds to the disciples "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. Jesus ministry is to the Lost Sheep of Israel not the gentiles.

The woman undeterred and with faith responds to Jesus. She does not take offence – she kneels at his feet – and asks only for a crumb that falls from the Masters' table. She not only knows her place – that she is not only a gentile woman, but also a Canaanite woman – a dog. But from this place she sees in the person of Jesus what many of the Jewish nation failed to see as she recognises Jesus as Lord and Master.

She has now captured Jesus attention and he hears not only the pleading of healing for her daughter but in the midst of her shouting Jesus sees beyond who society and the culture says that this woman is," a gentile- a Canaanite woman – a do" and he sees her faith in him when many have struggled to see him as she sees him. Her faith is deep and real and cries out with not only knowledge of who Jesus his but a belief

that he can heal her daughter. Jesus acknowledges her faith and grants her desperate plea and her daughter is healed.

We do not hear any more about this woman but, she would have returned home her faith in Jesus deeper and her life changed forever. Her daughter is healed – her faith in the messianic Son of David has been acknowledged by Jesus. From her faith and Jesus looking beyond who others said she was to the woman who is kneeling before him crying out in the hope that he would glimpse the small crumb of faith she had. The messianic Lord, Son of David heard her cry and answered and her encounter with Jesus and her story of his willingness to heal her daughter we can assume went out into the gentile world and this spark of faith lit a fire that continues today giving a new hope for the gentiles.

This is the turning point for Jesus from this point on his ministry expands to include the gentiles.

From this one woman's belief in Jesus and her persistent pleading – Jesus ministry begins to go out to all nations. Because of her persistence and faith God's kingdom is open to all not only the house of Israel.

As Brendan Byrne notes: It is not easy for modern readers to grasp the immensity of the barrier being broken through here, one that preoccupied the Church for a least two generations. Our problem is the other way around: to appreciate sufficiently the particular place of Israel and the Jewish people in the covenant fidelity of God. The woman stands for all us Gentiles. We can learn from her faith. But can also learn from her humble and honest acceptance of Israel's priority in the divine scheme of salvation.

How do we respond to the reading today?

As Jesus life and the Canaanite woman's life collide also there is a collision of race, creed, culture, gender, tradition and deeply held beliefs. During this encounter both Jesus and the woman are changed as their perception of who each other are is both challenged and affirmed.

The Canaanite woman's belief and faith that Jesus is the Messiah is affirmed. Her life changed forever – her daughter healed – and she knows Jesus in a real and tangible way. She has a story to tell others of the mercy shown to her and her daughter by Jesus the Lord, Son of David.

Jesus' encounter with this Canaanite woman causes him to see her deeply as she accepts her place and believed a crumb is sufficient and sees her faith. She is not longer an outsider, a annoying women she is a woman of deep faith. Jesus perception is changed as he sees beyond who others say she is "an outsider" he not only sees her faith but he responds affirming her and healing her daughter and welcomes her in.

As we read of this encounter between Jesus and the woman it gives us hope that like the Canaanite woman we too can turn to Jesus in times of need with faith and dare to ask for healing. We will be healed, we will be affirmed and our lives changed and a

testimony for many as we live out life in faith and openness to growing in our relationship with Jesus.

As we are changed will we be able to listen to those who feel as they are outsiders hear their cry and desire to know Jesus. Will we like Jesus be able to hear the cries of those around us and able to see beyond who others say they are, listen to them, see their faith as Jesus did and be for them the hand, face and heart of love and mercy of Jesus and affirm their faith.

A yes to these questions comes at a cost

This will cost us as we are challenged to see beyond what the world sees and see others as Jesus sees them with the eyes of God who desire that none shall be lost. Because this woman's faith we see the willingness of God to draw all people into relationship.

The question being asked of the reader from the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman is: How do you and I respond when we are challenged to look beyond our perceptions of who is acceptable to God and be open to look through God's eyes and see them in the light of God's love for them.

As the song we began with today challenges us to look beyond creed – colour – gender and be Jesus to our neighbour.

Our final song it only takes a spark reminds us of how important is a small spark and in this case a small morsel of bread and crumb that set the world on fire and God's kingdom is expanded out to us all.

We end our service today with the words:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. And we respond with **In the name of Christ.**

AMEN

Another ending could be: Our worship had ended – our service now begins.

Our lives changed because of an encounter with God in worship deepens our call and service to be God's people wherever we are. When our lives collide as Jesus and the Canaanite woman's life did, may we too can stop listen affirm and be challenged so that God's grace, mercy and love change us and those we meet.

AMEN