

**"SHOUTING AFTER JESUS"**

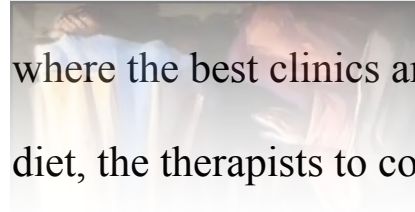
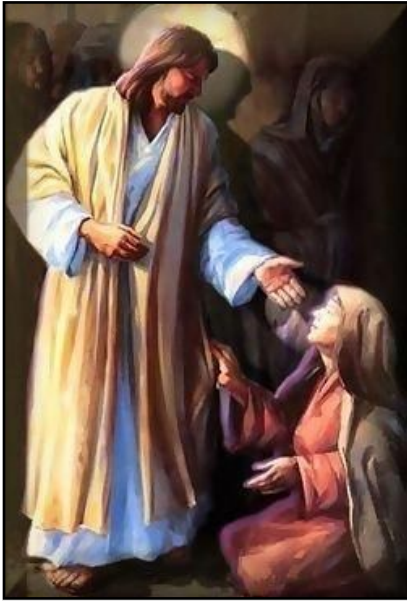
**Matthew 15:10-28**

***Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost; August 16, 2020***

First things first: I'm assuming from today's gospel lesson that Jesus is flat-out fried here. He's tired. It's the only way I can excuse his behavior, actually — by assuming he's exhausted, empty, and in serious need of a day off. This is a story to point to when someone takes issue with the doctrine of Jesus being fully human as well as being fully divine. That Jesus referenced the toilet to talk about the condition of the human heart makes the case that he, too, experienced nature's call.

I'm also going to assume that Jesus chose Tyre and Sidon because that was a good place to hide. It's a Canaanite district, right? A lot of Gentiles lived here. Jesus was only a big-name in Jewish circles, or so he thought. The word was out that he was here. At least it was out with a particular woman who saw her chance and went for it.

This Canaanite woman had a sick daughter. We don't know what was wrong with the girl, but we know what having a sick child can do to a parent. It makes you desperate. It makes you say nasty things to office receptionists who won't give you an appointment until November. It



makes you very rude to doctors who run numerous tests before telling you a diagnosis. It makes you want to scream at the insurance company representative who tells you that your coverage doesn't include experimental treatments. It makes you stay up all night

doing research on the internet, finding out where the best clinics are, the best doctors, the nutritionists to cope with diet, the therapists to cope with stress, the banks to loan you money, the healers who work their magic, the clergy who promise their prayers bring miracles.

We *know* what having a sick child can do to a parent. It's frankly a little surprising that the disciples don't. "Please send her away," they grumble to Jesus. "She's shouting after us." As if they couldn't imagine why a mother would plant herself in front of the house where Jesus was, and not take "no" for an answer. As if they had never heard of an anxious parent shouting at some medical bureaucrat who won't give them the time of day. As if they had never seen a beautiful girl being

eaten alive by a disease no one understands, growing thinner and tell you to weigh her every day, and watch her every bite, because she can't help herself. It's some demon that has her, not you, anyone; and no one can help her, except maybe Jesus — which is why there's this mother standing outside the door shouting at the disciples because they won't let her in.

It's not so hard for us to imagine. We don't know what's up with the disciples, why they have turned into bouncers at the door, but most of us do know what being overstressed and under paid can do to a person. It makes you feel tired. It makes you empty. It makes you feel overwhelmed. It makes you numb so you stop seeing the faces of the people so hungry with their need. All you see is the face of the clock, so stingy with its hands, that take forever to point to the time when you finally get to leave for the night. We know what the twenty-fifth shouting person in a row can do to us. You stop seeing the face of Christ in that person. When you can't see Christ, you can't do anything.

Maybe that's why Jesus went away to Tyre and Sidon, so he could get back to the biblical text, back to his mojo, back to that filled-up place

that has so much to give, and all the time in the world to listen. No sooner does he check into his room but there's someone shouting for him at the door.

“Please send her away,” the bouncer/disciples grumble to Jesus. “She’s shouting after us.” It’s an odd sort of phrase that perhaps stirs a memory deep down: “She’s shouting after us.” Haven't we heard that before? Haven't we met people in the Bible who keep shouting out after us, crying out to Israel? Old Testament prophets, maybe? Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and others? Shouting at Israel — God’s chosen people — to “Get with it for God’s sake! Get back to the scripture text where you belong! Get back to the word of God so you can remember who you are!”

I've been thinking about that woman, shouting after Jesus, crying out, just like the prophets did, just like they still do — if you think about it. Isn't that the function of a prophet, to be so annoying and so persistent and so loud that eventually you have to pay attention, because you can tell they're just not going to shut-up? Isn't that the function of a prophet, to cry out after us, saying: “What’s the matter with you? I don’t

recognize this behavior. Who do you think you're trying to be? One of God's bouncers? You're one of God's people! You don't call the shots!"

Just because we're tired, we often think we have the right to say the first thing that pops into our heads: "I'm sorry, but pastoral ministry is a real grind. Please come back at a more convenient time."

"I'm sorry, you don't belong to our congregation. I'm afraid we only do this for those who belong."

"I'm sorry, I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to Canaanite dogs, and it's not fair, is it, to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs?"

Isn't that the function of a prophet, to cry out after us until we bump our heads on our own truth?

Looking at today's gospel story honestly — which I assume Jesus would want us to do — it's like Jesus bumps his head in this story. He bumps his head right on his own words. Isn't that what a prophet stirs in you, that memory of who you are, and what your mission is? This woman shouts the *truth* at Jesus!

“Who do I say that you are, Jesus? I say you’re not some off-duty rabbi, and you’re not God’s Bouncer. I say you’re the light of all nations. I say you’re the way, the truth and the life, even for my Canaanite daughter, so get up and get with it!

“And if you’re not God’s Bouncer, neither are these people you have called to be your disciples!”

Ouch!

Notice that Jesus doesn’t get angry or feel threatened when he’s backed into a corner and challenged. He doesn’t try to get away, storming out of the house. Jesus sees grace in the relationship.

Isn’t that what a prophet is supposed to stir in you, a memory of the way back? That’s the power of this Word. It’s the way, the truth, the life, and the way back. The way back from Tyre and Sidon — where a lot of us go to hide, and where the most annoying people are often the ones who help us remember the truth. Why is that?

That’s a good question to discuss with the Almighty. God’s answer, without doubt, has something to do with the cross. And that cross annoys us still.

I'm going to leave it at that because if there's any prophetic edge here, too many words can wear it down.

How's this for a prophetic blessing? May the cross of Christ get under your skin and annoy you like crazy.

Amen.