



Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, 8-20-2023 – Joseph. Canaanite Woman

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene
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[Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28, Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b, Romans 10:5-15, Matthew 14:22-33](#)

Creator God, may we recognize that we are members of one human family, each of us made in your image. We ask for healing of divisions so that we may be reconciled with our siblings, and share more than crumbs from your abundant table. *Amen.*

Jacob loved Rachel but he was tricked into marrying her older sister, Leah. He eventually also married Rachel and between his two wives and two concubines (who were his wives' maids), Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter. The two youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin, were Jacob's favorites because they were the 'sons of his old age' and because, their mother, Rachel, was the wife Jacob loved.

There is a LOT of Bible [Genesis 37:28 to chapter 45] and ~20 years between last week's episode of 'the family of Jacob,' when Joseph's older brothers wanted to kill him because: he flaunted being the 'favored' son, tattled on them to their father, and went on about his dreams of being 'in charge of everything!' Instead of murdering him, they sold Joseph to be enslaved in Egypt where, after many troubles (including false accusations that resulted in jail time) Pharaoh himself DID put Joseph in charge of everything as a reward for interpreting Pharaoh's disturbing dream. In this week's episode, Joseph finally reconciled with his brothers.

I'm recalling author/humorist Erma Bombeck's book, **Family – the Ties that Bind... and Gag!** and also appreciating the first verse of Psalm 133, "Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity!"

In his letter to the Romans, Paul ensured a congregation of Jewish believers that God has not rejected Judaism. Paul has credentials! He is, a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee; "an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." The footnote in my Oxford Annotated Bible says, "As in Elijah's time [1Kings 19:10, 18] there is a 'remnant' of the faithful. Paul is no more alone than was Elijah."

In the Gospel reading, the Scribes and Pharisees continue to harass Jesus because his followers don't follow the rules and wash their hands before eating. There were good reasons for the purity rules. People ate from a common dish

with their fingers. Hands were supposed to be ritually washed before meals. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "Through this ritual, observant Jews understand themselves to consume all food as though it were in the sanctified status of a Temple offering, so that their home table can be imagined as the Temple altar itself, a locus of the divine presence."

Jesus had more vital concerns. Eating with dirty hands doesn't make someone an evil person. Harboring "evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness and slander are what defile a person" not dirty hands or eating forbidden foods. Evil comes from the heart.

Then Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon, at that time the 2 largest cities in Phoenicia [what is now Lebanon]. If he was looking for the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' he chose the right place. The Canaanite woman, a Gentile, cried out to Jesus using a title for the Jewish Messiah. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus ignored her. His disciples urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." This is the same way the disciples tried to shoo the little children away from Jesus, and to silence Bartimaeus, the blind man, who twice cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The determined mother knelt before Jesus, blocking his path. "Lord, help me." Jesus replied, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Touché!

Jesus responded to the Canaanite woman using the same title for her that he used at the wedding in Cana when he spoke to his mother about the wine, 'Woman...' Jesus recognized the Canaanite's humanity. "Woman," he said to the distressed mother, "great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

This section of the Gospel has a counterpart in Mark (the oldest Gospel, which may or may not make it more accurate) with several distinctions. In Mark's version, Jesus entered a house in Tyre and asked that no one know he is there. But a Syrophoenician woman followed Jesus into the house. 'Syrophoenician' does not carry the long-standing Jewish prejudice associated with 'Canaanite,' even though both groups were Gentiles who worshipped multiple gods, including Baal. Jesus did not mention "the lost sheep of Israel," but he did refer to the woman as a 'dog.' She replied, "Sir, even dogs under the table eat the children's

crumbs.” Then Jesus said to her, ‘For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.’ She went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Please excuse me for preferring Matthew’s version of the story. I suppose in the final analysis, what really matters is that the daughter was cured. The bigger picture, for me, is that Jesus and his followers, including Paul, who was late to believe, expanded their ministry to include those who were not born Jewish, but who believed that Jesus was indeed “Lord, Son of David ... the Messiah, the Christ... the Son of the living God.”

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹

Amen.

¹ Prayer for the Human Family, Book of Common Prayer (BCP), pg. 815.