



Matthew 15:21-28 NRSV

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” 24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 27 She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28 Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Background

We continue the gospel of Matthew focusing on the characteristics of Christ. Right before this passage, Jesus is speaking with leaders of the temple. They’re debating the tradition. Among these debates is the question about religious rituals around eating. Jesus has established himself as someone who asks critical questions about the faith.

Today’s lesson will focus on making amends.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. Why do you think people have a hard time saying sorry?

What's happening during this passage?

Jesus left a place of teaching and debating and ended up in a new place. A Canaanite woman (an outsider) began asking, "Lord, help my daughter, she is tormented by a demon." He did not answer, and eventually, the disciples asked him to "send her away." This woman persists and he says to her, "I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and then, "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." With a quick retort, the woman says, "Okay, well even dogs eat crumbs." Immediately, Jesus heals the daughter from a distance.

What does this show us about Jesus?

Jesus had just finished making a speech about the tradition needing to be amended, or at least expanded to include more people. Poetically, Jesus is given a chance to practice what he preaches, and at least initially, he does not succeed. Some say that Jesus was making this Canaanite woman an object lesson for the disciples. Yet there's no evidence in the text that she was in on the joke. In fact, the fact that she retorted so quickly to his unkindness is evidence of a defense mechanism. She was likely used to being talked to with disdain and learned to develop a quick wit in response.

How does Jesus make amends for his treatment?

Jesus offended this woman. He insinuated that she was a dog. Only because she responded back with a retort did he see the seriousness of the situation. Our written narrative doesn't tell us much about how the daughter, the woman, or Jesus reflected on this encounter. But we do know that Jesus changed his mission after this encounter.

The Jesus who once believed he was here for the "children first" eventually became the Jesus who said "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first." The Jesus who once said "I'm here for the lost sheep of the house of Israel" became the Jesus who said "even if 99 sheep were gathered, I would seek the one who was lost." Jesus makes amends by changing his policy and his posture towards outsiders. We don't know much of what happened to the mother or her daughter, but as far as the text describes, the girl had been healed.

What do you feel about this passage?

This passage is not as popular as others. Often, we don't want to imagine that Jesus was susceptible to having a bias. But he himself was vulnerable to a society that taught him to value some people and not others. However, he made the choice to recalibrate his work.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

A reboot is an opportunity to restart a film/tv series and reimagine it. The 1978 film *The Wiz* was an interpretation of the late 30's film, *The Wizard of Oz*. *The Wiz* imagined this story with an all-Black cast.

But fans and critics of the 1978 film *The Wiz* rightfully called it out for engaging colorist and fatphobic tropes. The evil witch was played by a fat, dark-skinned Black woman, while the good witch was a light skinned, thin Black woman.

For the 2015 reboot, the evil witch was played by Mary J. Blige and the good witch was played by Uzo Aduba. Such casting deci-

sions are not enough to undo centuries of colorist and fatphobic ideologies, but they do cause us to reflect on why we are trained to believe that certain people are evil and others are good. A good reboot holds the story core while imagining what could have been better. Reboots are not the end. Reboots can begin new worlds. We should not fear a reboot.

Journal: Are there any places in your life that need to be rebooted?

Closing: Sing/watch “Even Me,”

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgiMpj-HiKU>

*Lord I hear of showers of blessings
Thou art scattering full and free
Showers the thirsty souls refreshing
Let some drops now fall on me
Even me, Lord, Even me.
Let some drops now fall on me.*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the giver of every good and perfect gift. You give us life, health, strength, love. We thank you for the moments you’ve shown up for us and held us close. Lord, we need you to come by our houses and bless us.

While on others Thou art calling, do not pass us by. Savior, hear our humble cry. We need you in this world desperately.

We know you are with us. Give us the courage to show up and ask for what we need, whether it’s from You, our family, our government, our world. Thank you for meeting us at the very point of our need, every time.

In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen