

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28

Preached by Rev. Irene Pak Lee at Stone Church of Willow Glen

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God of all of us,

Help us to hear and receive your Word for us again this day that we may truly understand; that, understanding, we may believe; and believing, we may follow your way in all faithfulness, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

## **Being Fully Human**

Someone recently asked me what podcasts I'm listening to these days or what "influencer" I'm following on social media. Who are those that resonate with or inspire you? As I sat with that question, I realize the people I'm most drawn to are the people who do not sugarcoat their realities and instead speak truth to everything ... whether it is truth to their pain, their hurt, their angst and also their joy and everyday real lives. I want to hear from moms who tell me they fed their kids snacks for dinner for their own sanity and that sometimes trying to "enjoy these days while they last" feels unsustainable when your kid looks you in the eye and pours milk on the floor. Of course, I want to hear about the strength it took to overcome something hard, but I also want to hear that there were moments where they fell apart and were not sure if they could endure before they got there. I think if you grew up in any kind of environment that encouraged you to suck it up and get over it or to only see the bright side of everything, hearing people keeping it real and speaking truths and giving voice to those things that you also experience and know deep within your soul is true is liberating. You know, people being human.

As I continued to reflect upon this, I realized that this is true as long as it is not coming from someone we have lifted up on a pedestal in our own lives. Like if it's a stranger or someone we have no particular emotional attachment to that tells us that sometimes they fall apart, it's fine. But if someone we admire or who seems unbreakable and we've somehow attached our strength to theirs has a bad day or a bad moment and acts out in ways we never expected them to, we are quick to excuse their behavior, try to justify what might be going on in their lives, or on the other end of that, we might be disgusted by it and write them off. In that case, I notice that we do not like that they are being fully human.

So saying that, I need to confess that as we come into today's gospel reading that I tried every which way to excuse, go around, and justify Jesus' really bad behavior. I mean, he's the son of God, so yes, I've put him on a pedestal. He is who I look to to guide me in ways of compassion and grace and reconciliation, justice and love for all people. And so every time I read this passage of his interaction with the Canaanite woman, I cringe a bit and try to see if I can find a way to excuse his really bad behavior.

I mean, the man HAS been going nonstop. A few chapters back, Jesus finds out that his cousin John has been killed and he *tries* to get away, probably to grieve, but the crowds follow him and find him and they're hungry. So he feeds them with some bread and fish. Jesus tries to get away to have some alone time again after that, and sends his disciples ahead on a boat. And then there's a storm and as you heard Evie preach last week, he walks on water, Peter walks on water for a hot minute, and then the storm calms and as they get off the boat, there's another crowd of folks, this time with religious leaders, the Pharisees, waiting to test Jesus.

I'm tired just reading Jesus' schedule. And as someone who needs alone time, I cannot ignore those one-verse lines about how Jesus tries to get away to be alone. He's done some good hard work-healing, feeding, teaching, walking on water. You know, the usual. 😊 But as a result, with no break, I don't think it's a stretch to say that Jesus is legit tired.

He starts losing it with the Pharisees when they come up to him after all of that and ask him why the disciples are breaking tradition and not washing their hands before they eat. I didn't read the whole passage, but that's the interaction that happens right before our story today. And as much as I would agree that you should wash your hands before you eat, Jesus gets angry with them and calls them hypocrites and storms off. When he explains to the disciples what he meant, he teaches them that it's not what you eat and how you eat it that defiles you, but it's what comes out of your mouth. And what comes out of your mouth proceeds from your heart. I want you to remember this.

Because no sooner has Jesus said it is what comes out of your heart and mouth that gets you in trouble that he meets this Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon who is begging for mercy for her daughter. He is in a foreign land, the land and people who have been enemies and oppressors of the

Israelites in the past. So there is a history of distrust, separation, and otherness here between Jesus and his disciples and this Canaanite woman. And as she is screaming and yelling alongside Jesus and his disciples begging for mercy and seeking healing for her daughter, scripture tells us Jesus ignores her. He pretends not to hear her and keeps on walking.

You know, I bet many of us, including myself, have ignored the pleas of someone who is in need, but for some reason, we do not like that Jesus does it here.

This does not deter the woman one bit. And honestly, if any of us were seeking to save the life of our child who was being tormented in any way, being ignored would not deter us either. We would do anything to save and help a child we love.

So she keeps yelling and begging.

He keeps ignoring.

And the disciples are so distracted, she must be making quite the scene, because the disciples' urge Jesus to *please* send her away. "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

And then Jesus finally speaks and says to her, "*Sorry. I didn't come here to save you.*" Remember the guy who just said, who just said, "*it is what comes out of your mouth that defiles you? And what comes out of your mouth proceeds from your heart?*" Yeah, that same guy just told her she was not part of the chosen people. Jesus, why are you being so mean right now? There's got to be a reason. Some Biblical commentators say that Jesus is just testing her with his replies, and MAYBE that's what's happening.

But, in light of what's happened before all of this, I think Jesus is just exhausted, in need of a nap, probably also needs a snack, and he feels like he has nothing left to offer to anyone, let alone an outsider. He's being human right now.

The Rev. Marci Glass reflects on this passage in this way: "This is one of the glimpses we get in the gospels to remind us that Jesus was fully human. We claim in our creeds and confessions that Jesus is both fully human, fully divine.

And then, when he does something fully human, like turning over tables at the temple, or losing it with the Pharisees, or making snarky comments to a poor Canaanite woman who is just seeking some help for her kid for goodness sake, we run screaming from the text and pull out our pictures of Jesus with the Halo, the nicely bleached robe, and the perfect smile and we say, “fully divine. fully divine. fully divine.”

She then asks: “Why is that? Why is the idea of Jesus behaving like you and me so troubling to us?”

You know, I think part of it is because we want someone in our lives to have it all together all the time. And if you grew up with the hard line that Jesus had to be perfect, then this piece of fully human Jesus is harder to swallow. Human beings are conflicted about being human beings and so when we see Jesus being human, we don’t like it.

And so I want to draw our attention to the Canaanite woman in this story for a moment because it is a story in scripture where I believe an outsider and her insistence and persistence expands even Jesus’ view of who is included in the wide mercy of God’s grace. In other words, she changes Jesus’ mind.

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” is the first thing he says to her. I did not come to save you. His acknowledgement of her in this moment gives her an opening and she stops yelling and comes and kneels before Jesus and says, “Lord, help me.” She knows she’s not part of the “insider” group, but her love for her child and her child’s healing keeps her going. Lord, help me.

“It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Yep, Jesus just said that. Glass reflects on this line saying, “Luckily, our Canaanite Woman isn’t going to let the fact that Jesus is fully human and is having a no good very bad day get in her way. She knows what she needs. And she’s not leaving until she gets it. He can tell her that salvation is for someone else. He can call her a dog. Doesn’t matter. She may not be fully divine, as he is, but her full humanity is also a sight to behold. He denies her humanity by calling her a dog, and she calls him on it.”

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

I wonder if that line stunned him into silence for a minute. The implication of her words moving through Jesus' heart and mind. She's saying there is enough. Even when he's being fully human and at his wits end. Even when he's being fully human and cannot see her humanity in his still limited scope of his mission and who it is for. There is still enough good news and a place at the table for everyone. What she is saying is look harder. Push further. Be better. I know it's here, you already have it. I don't need the whole loaf. Just the crumbs. There is enough grace to go around, Jesus. Expand the circle, dissolve the boundaries, widen the table. There are still crumbs that fall from the loaf and crumbs can also be enough. Giving and receiving crumbs can be enough. Her witness and persistence snaps Jesus out of it.

'Woman, great is your faith! Abundant is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly. Even when his faith and good manners were in limited supply, her faith was abundant. You know, even as cringy as it feels reading this passage, thank goodness this moment is recorded in scripture.

Because, even if we'd rather think of Jesus as only divine, this encounter reminds us that he was also fully human ... and Jesus being fully human ought to help us be more fully human ourselves and no matter how tired we are, at wits end, needing a nap or needing a snack, this story reminds us to aim for the better side of our human nature. Not to deplete ourselves to the point we have nothing more to give, but to remember that even crumbs are enough.

And our Canaanite woman in this story, being as fully human as she is, demonstrates the power and strength of our humanity. The ability to challenge, persist, ask and teach — she embodies this toward the one whom we call Savior. It reminds us that we too, can endure, ask and seek out the healing and justice we need for ourselves and for others.

Friends this story reminds us that our full humanity also means we must recognize the full humanity of the people with whom we're journeying through this life. Not just the ones we like, or the ones who look and talk and think like us. Being fully human means that we can be a hot mess sometimes, that we make mistakes and that we hurt each other, but it also means that we know how to advocate and persist and insist on healing and justice for those who are the most vulnerable. It means that we can change hearts and minds. It

means that even with barriers that seem insurmountable, that we can actually come to the same table and partake together.

When we read these stories of Jesus, where he seems so familiar somehow, I hope we'll remember even Jesus said the wrong thing to someone, at least once in his life, and was called on it. Fully human. And so are we. And so are all those on this life journey. And so friends, how is your fully humanness these days? Are you doing okay? Are you running on fumes? What's coming out of your heart and mouth these days? Might I just suggest some things? If you need a nap, take it. If you need a snack, go get one. If you or someone you love needs healing, keep crying out for relief. And when you think you don't have what the world needs, see if you can find some crumbs and start from there. May the crumbs lead us to remember there is enough. Enough for a burnt out Savior. Enough for an outsider and her daughter. Enough for you. Enough for me. Being fully human. Amen.