

## **TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 08/20/2023.**

This is one of those passages in the Bible in which Jesus does not behave as we expect. A woman comes to Him for help and initially, he says “No.” This answer is not the answer we expect...however, like most stories from the Bible, we cannot simply look at them on the surface. There is always more to understand. And this is one of those stories.

Our usual tendency is to focus on what Jesus does or does not do, say or does not say. But sometimes the other characters are the ones who can illuminate the greatest truths. And in this story, it is the woman who has much to teach us. Jesus, being fully aware that the disciples are watching and listening, **uses the woman to demonstrate the message He wants teach.**

**In response to her request for help, He says: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

In modern language Jesus was telling her, “You know the rules. You are not one of us. You are a Canaanite, an outsider, so, you are out of luck. We only take care of our own.” This response is probably the exact response the disciples were expecting. Jesus was expressing the worldview at the time. Canaanites and Jews just did not mix.

Jesus made it clear that he would not be helping the woman, but she would not accept it. For her, this division was an injustice that society had imposed. She was desperate for help and was willing to do whatever it took to get it, even if that meant going against the accepted norms. And so, she asked for help once again. Jesus, of course, knew exactly what he was doing by initially refusing to help the woman. He was giving her the opportunity to test her faith. Jesus opened a door for the woman, and **she walked right in to test her faith. Jesus opened a door for the woman, and she walked right through. She knew that Jesus would be able to help her, and she insisted He do so. Just because she was a Canaanite did not mean that her daughter was unworthy of healing.**

Just as social barriers existed in the time of Jesus, so do they exist today. Societal barriers take all forms. Some are exclusive clubs, some are gated communities, and some are walls between nations. Unfortunately, many social barriers involve the ‘haves’ trying to exclude the ‘have nots.’ We may try to call this exclusion something else, but at its core, this is what it is. And the people involved are not necessarily trying to be mean or do something wrong. So often it is just easier to exclude those who might complicate life as we know it. There seems to be part of each of us that wants to exclude.

Thanks be to God we have people who are willing to stand up and speak out, like the woman in the Gospel. Without courageous people willing to put themselves on the line, **nothing would change.** Like people on the outside being excluded by those on the inside. And so...., when we hear others speaking out about various injustices in our midst, it is critical **that we listen closely** and take seriously what they have to say. It is very possible that God is using that person to make the world a little closer to how he intended it to be.