

[Puts on shawl to be character of Syrophenician woman.]

Well, WHO in the world do I think I am, you might ask.

Fair enough.

But I – the Syrophenician woman

you just heard about – *I* ask,

WHERE in the world does Jesus think he is?

Seriously, Jesus had come into *my* neighborhood,

the region of Tyre,

a far northern coastal town way off his beaten path.

A mostly gentile area

where the small Jewish population had suffered persecution.

Yet here was Jesus.

And even up here his reputation had preceded him.

So what else could I do?

What would *you* do for a child you loved?

Like me, you'd do whatever it took to get help.

Sure, I knew my "place" – female, gentile, foreigner,

with a sick child thought to be possessed by

a demon.

I was as "ritually unclean" as you get.

But can you blame me for doing the natural thing

and try to get help for my child?

Be honest.

Deep down, don't you think Jesus' response is

harder to understand than mine?

You heard the story.

Jesus – your sweet Jesus – compares interacting with me,

a desperate mother,

to throwing food . . . to the *dogs*.

"Let the children (of Israel) be fed first" said Jesus,

"for it is not fair to take children's food and

throw it to the dogs.”

It hurts to hear that even now.
Frankly I’m still amazed I had the presence of mind
to come up with that snappy come-back –
respectful, yes, but forceful and
determined to stand my ground.

“Sir,” I said, “even the dogs under the table
eat the children’s crumbs.”

And with that Jesus gave me a look that wouldn’t let go.
My life hasn’t been the same since and,
you know what,
I don’t think his has been either.

Because instead of reprimanding me,
instead of lording it over me, Jesus said,
Lady . . . “for saying that the demon has left
your daughter.”

I realize you’re more accustomed
to hearing things like that *other* healing story
read today after mine–
about the deaf man Jesus healed with no questions asked.

But I ask you to dwell for a moment
on my unusual story.
I don’t think there’s another quite like it
in that fancy gospel book of yours.

You see, I honestly believe that Jesus and I
were *both changed*
by our encounter that day.
My change was obvious; my daughter was made whole.

But Jesus?
Well, he’s changed too.
His mission becomes more expansive, more . . . whole.
Big and wide enough to show that God’s love
isn’t confined to one region or gender or nationality,

or to folks who look or believe or love a certain way.

It turns out that in Christ there are “no crumbs”
but always more than enough love to go around.
There are *no outcasts* either.

So here I am, a voice from another time and land,
a party crasher in your pretty church here.
But you’ve already seen that I’m not afraid
to say what’s in my heart.
So I’m going to point out that
I’ve noticed that you too live in a world
where people are divided and pitted against one another,
when they should be united.
I hear too much talk of building walls and
not enough about bridges.

So I thought I should make sure you know what
I learned from my personal encounter with Jesus.
I learned that we all need healing of one kind or another.
I learned that to think we should “all just get along” isn’t naïve,
but HOLY.
That one can be both steadfast AND open to change.
And, yes, it’s up to us to stand up and speak up
for those who need a voice.

After all, if this was good enough for Jesus,
then for God’s sake
why not us?

Why not *you*?

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