



52A PENTECOST 11A BIBLE STUDY

Listen and understand

Abstract

Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.
Matthew 15:28

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52A Pentecost 11A Bible Study

Listen and understand

Sunday, August 16, 2020 | 11A Pentecost | Proper 15
Year A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Genesis 45:1–15

Psalm Psalm 133

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Isaiah 56:1, 6–8

Psalm Psalm 67

New Testament Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32

Gospel (Matthew 15:10–20) 21–28

Jesus has two tricky encounters, first with the Pharisees, then with a Canaanite woman, that seemed to be linked by food. In fact, the link is deeper – faith and membership of God’s people – and the outcome of the encounters is something of a surprise.

This week’s resources explore: not being distracted by what doesn’t matter; learning from the voice of the outsider.

Welcome and opening prayer

A prayer of approach

Lord God, as we come before you now,
we open our hearts to you.

Help us to see that we can learn so much from others,
even from those with whom we think
we may not share much in common.

Make us willing to stand out from the crowd,
to hear your voice, and act upon it.

Amen.

Introduction

Desperate times don’t always call for desperate measures, but desperate times always call for Jesus.

There are only three people in the Bible who were specifically commended by Jesus for their great faith: a Roman officer who pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant, a woman who had been haemorrhaging blood for twelve years and touched the border of Jesus’ robe in hopes of receiving healing, and this Canaanite woman who came to Jesus begging him to heal her demon-possessed daughter.

The funny thing is that none of these three people had the right according to the Jewish law to approach Jesus with a request for help.

They were separated from him by a huge wall of cultural and religious norms.

By the Law, none of these 3 people had the right to bring their desperation to Jesus.

But Jesus didn’t reject them or correct them.

In fact, he commended each one of them for their great faith.

Readings

(Matthew 15:10–20) 21–28

[

10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. 11 What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

13 He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

15 Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

16 “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. 17 “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

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21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Present the Gospel

The disciples are marginal in both sections of the reading, yet they provoke the action and words of Jesus. In advance, delegate a group of people to sit together in the congregation and take the role of the disciples in the reading, with one nominated as ‘Peter’. They remain in situ when they speak – use of a microphone will help them to be heard. You will also need a narrator, Jesus and the Canaanite woman. The Bible text (15.10-28), omitting some of the ‘he/she/they said’ phrases, provides the script.

Jesus stands alone at the front. The disciples might choose to sound a bit like busybodies. The person playing the role of the Canaanite woman should enter from the rear and meet Jesus in the middle of the worship space.

Exegesis

Matthew 15.(10-20),21-28

At first glance the two sections of this passage seem unconnected. But read together, the second story (from v.21) takes on a different hue. It all starts with the Pharisees criticising Jesus’ followers over their hygiene (v.2), to which Jesus replies that what makes people unclean does not come from what they put into their mouths, but from what is in their hearts. His disciples tell him that he has upset the Pharisees with this answer, and he tells them that he does not care – because they are

blind guides. When Peter asks Jesus to explain the parable, it's unclear what he is referring to – is it verse 11 or 14? Jesus explains his saying about food and goes on to say that people demonstrate they are unclean by what they say and how they treat other people.

The story of Jesus' encounter with the woman shares the thematic link of food and belonging. Indeed, the whole of chapter 15 be a collection of stories that have to do with the basis of inclusion in God's people.

So, a Canaanite – and we might recall that there are two such women, Rahab and Tamar, in Jesus' family tree (Matthew 1.3-4) – seeks healing for her daughter. Jesus is silent. But the woman must have persisted because his disciples implore Jesus to send her away because of her incessant shouting. Jesus tells her he has come only for those born in the house of Israel – perhaps one of the disciples had suggested that if Jesus did what she wanted; she'd leave them alone. But she persists, kneeling before him, imploring him to help. Jesus reiterates his previous answer, injecting it with typical Jewish anti-Gentile invective – 'dogs' – suggesting that what is meant for Israel should not be given to outsiders.

Generally, use of the term 'dogs' in the Old Testament is a derogatory one, a metaphor for people who are beyond the pale. It sounds like a final rejection of the woman's request. Yet, it could be a proverbial saying that offers an invitation to respond. And this the woman does, giving as good as she gets, concluding the proverbial statement by suggesting that the children, of course, are fed first – but the house dogs then get their share.

Jesus is amazed. Peter, listening to this, was told a short time ago that he was a man of little faith; now he hears Jesus saying that this woman has great faith. The contrast is obvious, and not just with Peter but also with the leaders of the house of Israel (15.1-9). Although Jesus has primarily come as Israel's Messiah, his goal is to reach the nations with his saving grace.

Picture Pointers

- When have you ever experienced life from the viewpoint of an outsider?
- How can we be better at listening to those who are 'outsiders'?
- What new understandings might we gain from listening to them?
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Live your faith action

Do something that gives you another perspective this week: e.g. listen to some music or watch a TV programme that you do not normally listen to/watch. Talk with a friend about the experience

A sending out prayer

We go out today,
renewed and strengthened in faith,
ready to serve you, Lord,
and find you in the people we meet.
We go out to follow you, and our hearts.
Lead us, good Lord.

Amen.