

Year A, Proper 15 (Trinity 10)

Matthew 15:21-28

When was the last time you changed your mind about something?
so much of what I see, read and hear in the world around us today tells me people don't listen with any intention of someone changing their mind. Right now, it seems that opinions are set in concrete and the only reason one would listen to a person holding the opposing view to your own is to respond and prove them wrong. So often I see people listening to others only to respond and not to learn. Yet in this gospel portion Jesus listens to the Canaanite woman and changes his mind.

This passage is not a simple one to explore. To begin with when hearing it many of us, including me! feels uncomfortable... it doesn't sit well with our idea of a perfect Jesus. I have read several different versions of sermons on this topic which soften the events, explaining that Jesus was simply teaching the disciples about inclusivity or that calling someone a dog was not actually such an insult at the time... Perhaps all of these are true but I'm afraid I don't know.

What I do know is that this passage follows close after Peter's failed attempt to walk on water. In that gospel portion Jesus says to Peter 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?', a stark contrast to the 'Woman, great is your faith!' that Jesus says to the Canaanite woman. That's significant because Canaanites were not considered 'clean' by the Jewish people, women even less so: Rabbi's were not meant to speak to women in public! She was not a member of the people who Jesus had been sent to minister too... yet she has faith. Her faith is so strong that she is willing to ignore the disciples attempts to remove her and to ignore Jesus' initial words of dismissal and argue with him. Her faith is strong enough to cause Jesus to seemingly change his mind.

There are several notable Canaanite women in the Bible. Most of them are mentioned in some way in Matthew's gospel... the gospel these verses come from. This woman is notable for her courage and that she is the only person who challenges Jesus in scripture and prevails. In the first the chapter of Matthew another three are mentioned- Rahab, Tamar, and Ruth. All three women are 'foreigners' but yet they are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy... Jesus came to save the Jewish people not because God's plan of redemption was solely for the Jewish people but because the Jews were then to become the light for the rest of the world. The Old Testament reading for today names God as the one who gathers the outcasts... who will rejoice with foreigners who join themselves to him. These Canaanite women challenge the idea of salvation belonging only to the Jewish people, not only were women who turned to God, but they were also women who became ancestors of Christ! The woman in our story shows that faith can come from surprising and unexpected places.

This happened to me once on a train I had a stranger sit next to me and begin a conversation. I made several assumptions when they did this, that they were clearly awful for speaking to me. That this was going to be a terrible journey... yet I quickly realise this person was incredibly interesting as well as being a Christian... the conversations we ended up having really helped me in my personal life at the time. And I enjoyed the journey immensely. I wonder if you've ever been surprised by someone's faith or their understanding?

This week I've been horrified to watch films of News Journalists waving to asylum seekers on boats like were tourists or a tourist attraction. We probably all have views on migration and what our government

should be doing... but those migrants have faith. They have so much faith that life in our country will be better than the homes they are leaving behind that they are willing to risk their lives and the lives of their children to try and get here. There is much we can learn from their faith, even if it is to be aware and grateful of how much we have... and maybe to consider what we can share.

Faith does not always present itself as we expect it to. Peter failed. This foreign woman succeeds. We need to be open to the idea that anyone can have something of value to share with us. We need to be aware that God can be present in the lives of other people and of people we don't expect, or want to be serving him. Being be open to God to work in anyway or through anyone we are following Jesus' example and being willing to change our minds. Amen.