

Reflection: I'm A Nobody Inspired by James 2:1-1-17 and Mark 7:24-30

The Syrophoenician woman is a nobody. As far as society is concerned, she is among the lowest of class, a gentile from the wrong side of the tracks and to boot, a woman as well. She has no standing. Regardless, in her desperation for her daughter, she bows before Jesus asking him to cast out her daughter's demon and heal her.

This is a very intriguing gospel story for it is one of only a few where Jesus does not react in the way we expect. In fact, he is downright rude and unfeeling. His response to the woman's plea is ***"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."***

Until now Jesus' ministry had primarily been among the Jews, to the people of Israel. Shocking as it might be his rebuke to the Syrophoenician woman can be interpreted to say, "I need first to preach and heal to the people of Israel. I'm not going to waste my time with others like you. I'm not going to throw spiritual food your way, it will be wasted." And in fact, as impossible as it is to fathom, Jesus refers to the woman as a dog.

That is rather astounding. Yes, it appears the humanness part of Jesus, like us, had something to learn. And he learned from a most unlikely source, an outcast woman who, with great courage and tenacity responded, ***"Sir,^[b] even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*** Meaning, "Even the lowly need to be fed, even the outcast has need of love, kindness and generosity."

I can visualize a rather stunned Jesus who suddenly realizes he has made a huge mistake. I've done that before. "Oh, dear, I have just guffawed rather badly, now what am I going to do?" Humbled, he tells the woman to go home, and she will find her daughter healed.

The next part of this gospel talks about more of Jesus' healing ways. Unfortunately, it offers no insight in what might have been Jesus' reflection on events of that day. I would love to have some idea of how he felt. It is certain this changed his ministry, for as we know he became a passionate advocate for justice for all people. That is how we know Jesus best.

This encounter with Jesus is hugely important in our ministry together as well as in our individual life journeys. Part of that is because we know that Jesus was fallible, and he made mistakes. It is important too because he understood that he could learn from human interactions. He wasn't always the teacher. More so, at least for me, is the commitment to justice and the bravery of the mother in our story. It would have taken considerable courage to question Jesus' judgement given his status.

Sometimes our discipleship as believers calls us to risk a great deal. Often, we can be intimidated by that. Perhaps this might be because we lack confidence. Perhaps it might be because we feel we are too ordinary to make an impact, too insignificant to be taken seriously.

But God doesn't believe you are ordinary, God believes you are special and gifted. God believes you are all like the Syrophoenician woman, bold, courageous, and inspiring.

Labeling us as "nobodies" is not really fair. But we are really quite ordinary. We are not among the elite of society. We don't rub elbows with the rich and famous. Most of us live comfortably, but we don't have million-dollar annual incomes, own yachts, or private jets. We

don't have estates with manicured grounds, security guards, butlers and maids. We are not influential philanthropists or politicians. As fortunate as we are to be Peachlanders or Westbankers, we are typical folk, not the crême de la crême.

But the crême de la crême doesn't do the bulk of "works" as James talks about in his letter Shirley Mae read from. You, regular folk are among those who would accept a stranger into our midst, regardless of their appearance. You are the people who would welcome someone hard on their luck to join us during our fellowship hour. And you would offer them coffee and goodies.

You have ears for the broken and a heart for the lonely. You have empathy for the addict passed out in the supermarket doorway. You would give your seat to someone more needy on the bus and offer a few coins for a hot meal. You are not persuaded by glamour or riches. You are not inclined to self-righteous behaviour or superiority.

Those of us who might be ordinary, the humble servants, understand what James was saying. Our faith is made visible by our actions. We may be without status, even as the lowly Syrophoenician woman. But we always have a part to play in advancing the kin-dom that the Creator so desires for us all.

And that gives us the permission to question and challenge the actions of others, and even authority when it is appropriate to do so. The unconscionable behaviour of our churches and the Canadian Government for the Residential School crises needed to be challenged. And it was. So too does its lack of action on the 60's scoop and missing and murdered indigenous women.

Governments that would change legislation outlawing abortion and gay rights do irreparable harm and need to be challenged too. Racism, sexism and ageism might not be experienced in Peachland or Westbank, but they are elsewhere, and that is unacceptable. And today, as we recognize the first Sunday of Creation Time, let's try to be tolerant of tree huggers, individuals that protest fracking, and groups that rally for climate justice.

These objectors and the Syrophoenician women of the world have something important to say. They may be relative nobody's, but they speak truth to power and are God's voice in the world. And so, my friends are you.

Remember that if you ever feel insignificant, God knows otherwise. Thanks for listening this morning. Amen

