

Today's readings are all about inclusion. Inclusion of the poor and disadvantaged, inclusion of the Gentiles, the women, the pagans! As usual, Jesus is shocking in his message. You see, the woman in the Gospel today is a Greek woman and a pagan woman daring to talk in public to a Jewish rabbi. Her daughter is ill and any of you mothers understand the lengths to which you will go to get your child help. Jesus viewed his ministry as one to the Jews, to the children of Israel, so before this chapter Jesus spends all his time in Jewish territory. At the time of this reading Jesus has moved on to Greece, gentile territory. Jesus is expanding his ministry to be more inclusive, to show his disciples that they need to go to all people with the Good News. And along comes a woman, a Greek gentile pagan woman. And she dares to ask Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus' response comes with much controversy and speculation among scholars, but I'll skip all that so you all can get home before nightfall. What's important is that the woman won't take no for an answer and challenges Jesus, saying even the dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from the table. And Jesus' answer is go back to your daughter and rest assured that she is healed.

Next, while still in Greece, Jesus meets a man who is blind and has a speech impediment who wants to be healed. As Jesus touches his eyes and ears with spit, Jesus says Ephphatha! Be opened! And the Greek gentile man is healed.

These stories together indicate the coming together of Jews and gentiles, the widening of Jesus' ministry to include all others. Others different from ourselves. We are the gentiles that Jesus included with the Jews. And now we are to extend such inclusion to all others who might not be like us or believe like us or look like us or think like us. This is not easy. I once read that when Jesus said love your neighbor, he knew our neighbor would be different from us.

The woman in the gospel has been seen by some scholars as an icon of prejudice. This icon is the gate through which we must walk to encounter God's unbound love for all people. Throughout Christian history this woman is the Jew who Christians tried to eliminate in the Holocaust. This icon is the Muslim that Christians murdered in the Crusades. Later in our history this woman becomes the icon for Africans who we Christians stole, enslaved, lynched, and try to suppress their vote. She is the icon for the LGBT people who have been told by Christians they are an abomination.

As Bishop Spong said: The woman in today's gospel will always confront us until the walls of prejudice fall and we fling open the doors of our hearts.