

She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

God is constantly entering new territory and breaking boundaries. This God is in the unsettling business of meeting outsiders and granting them not just a crumb, but a place at the table. Jesus has entered into Tyre and Sidon where a Canaanite woman greets him. She is an ‘unclean outsider’, part of a people remembered as an old enemy of Israel. She somehow recognises him, not just as a roaming healer but as a rightful king and greets him as the “Son of David.” She begs his mercy to defeat a demon that has “severely” possessed her daughter. Jesus’ response is, perhaps, the most perplexing piece of this narrative. At first, he does not say a word to her, but does not send her away. Only after her persistence does he converse with her. Twice, he explains to her that his mission is first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The disciples also think that Jesus should stay focused on the needs of Israel and kept telling him to send her away. Perhaps, Jesus’ refusal to listen to the disciples gave the woman hope that her request would be heard. She kneels before him. The author of Matthew uses this action as one befitting a king. The magi, who are also Gentiles, are the first to offer worship to Jesus in this way. Kneeling is not only a sign of kingship, but also power. There is a connection between those who kneel before Jesus and the healings he performs e.g. a leper kneels who before Jesus and asks to be made clean (Mt 8:2). Jesus’ response to her second cry for help includes a reiteration of his mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He even likens her status as a Gentile to the status of the small, pet dogs who long to be fed from the table (15:26). The woman, however, is not deterred. She claims a place in the household, but it is not a position of privilege or even the position of an insider. She accepts the status of a family’s dog by claiming that even the dog enjoys crumbs from the table. She places hope in what others have discarded. This Son of David has so much power that there is enough power for the house of Israel and more than enough left over for her. She is not trying to thwart his mission. She just wants a crumb, recognising that even a crumb is powerful enough to defeat the demon that has possessed her daughter. Jesus praises her faith.

In the passage that immediately precedes this story, Jesus responds to challenges from the scribes and Pharisees by reframing the boundaries of clean and unclean. In 15:18, Jesus declares that what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and what comes out of the heart determines what makes one clean. What comes out of the Canaanite woman’s heart is faith - certainty that Jesus has power enough for Israel and power enough to save her non-Israelite daughter.

COCU 52A Readings

Genesis 45:1-28

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph is finally in a position where he could get revenge on his brothers for everything they have done to him. They urgently need Joseph, but Joseph certainly does not need them! The Pharaoh’s dream of famine has become a reality and, thanks to Joseph’s interpretation of this dream, Egypt has an abundance of grain. Rather than seize this golden opportunity to take revenge on his brothers, Joseph, instead, chooses to provide for them and their

families in their time of need. Despite having been treated like dirt and subjected to a catalogue of pain and suffering, Joseph chooses to receive his brothers, embrace them and forgive them.

We also read of how God used the despicable actions of Joseph's brothers to pave a way for Joseph's involvement in the birth of the nation of Israel. If we read on to Genesis 50, we learn that Joseph understands now that his brothers' actions were 'intended to harm me, but God intended it for good accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives' (Gen 50:20).

Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Psalm 133, the penultimate song of ascents, is based on the joy of harmonious relationships. The Psalmist opens with a statement that few would argue with! Sadly, when we look at our churches and denominations, it would be fair to say that we would struggle to claim that unity abounds...

Like the precious oil used for anointing those being dedicated to God's service, the unity described in this Psalm is meant to be an outward expression of our wholehearted service to the Lord.

There is a theme of abundant blessing in this Psalm with the imagery of oil flowing off the head, down the beard and on to robes and the plentiful dew of Mount Hermon, the tallest mountain in Palestine, falling on Mount Zion. Dew and rain are closely related to each other in Hebrew literature as sources of fertility and of regeneration of life.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

In this chapter of Romans, Paul starts by emphasising that not all Jews have rejected the message of God's salvation (Paul himself was a Jew, as were the disciples). The 'people whom he foreknew', the Jews, were the 'conduit' by

whom the message of God's salvation was to be made known across the world.

Jumping to verses 29-32, we see Paul explaining how the Jews and Gentiles were of mutual benefit to one another - when one was shown mercy, the other shared in the blessing. We are reminded that God kept his promises to 'the Patriarchs' (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and maintained his love for the Jews throughout.

Romans 11 concludes a 'section' of Paul's teachings about what his audience were expected to believe with an explanation of Israel's past, present and future. He is attempting to set out the foundations of the Christian faith, which results in a lot of theological wrestling on his part throughout. Like Paul, we can't be expected to have all the answers. What Paul emphasises in Romans 11 is that we are called to trust that God will never cease to be merciful, nor has God rejected his people. Why? Because God's promises are 'irrevocable' (v. 29).

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

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."
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