

Jesus Teaches on Non-Discriminatory Living

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matthew 15:21-28 at SALC 8/16/26

How do oppressed people remain Christians with this passage often used as a justification by people who oppress them? This passage about the Canaanite woman is used and abused over history. It is used for all kinds of discrimination, whether against women, whether against so-called differently abled people, whether people who may not fit the mainstream of acceptability due to being poor, too old, having certain so-called "non-typical" sexual orientations, or whether they are from a so-called "lesser race". Note I'm saying so-called" in inverted commas (British English) or quotation marks (American English). It was commonplace for British and European Colonialists to claim a superiority over indigenous habitants under the guise of Christianity. So just as the Jews considered themselves THE people of God and they looked down on all non-Jews, so later Christians did the same. In the modern age, I grew up in such a time under apartheid. How did this and other misquoted scripture still give me a sense of call to ministry to bring all people into a saving relationship with God?

Earlier this month I marked 34 years since my release from prison for organizing churches against apartheid with scripture as our basis. It was indefinite detention without trial. We were not allowed any reading or writing material, so the first morning in prison, I staged a lone protest from my isolation cell for us to be given bibles. I was all decked out with my leather strapped handmade sandals – you know the Jesus sandals and leather handmade cross around my neck, which the prison guards were too afraid to touch. The then long beard helped also helped to make me look like Jesus. After a week of daily petitions to the superior officers at this maximum security prison, I was given a

bible, then upon my insistence my whole section was given bibles. I chose to read and study just the four Gospel over and over, besides Psalms, Proverbs and of course, Job story of unfair suffering – but that's a story for another day.

When you read the whole gospel narrative from Matthew to John over and over, you get to understand Jesus fully and intimately. We should all try that. Amongst other things it makes clear, just from reading the scriptures, even without commentaries, that there is no way Jesus was racist or sexist or discriminatory towards anyone for whatever reason. When you read that Jesus heals the lepers and when the one Samaritan comes back to thank him, He notes that though healed 10 the nine Jews did not return. Jesus was doing more than healing but exposing racial discrimination. Jesus talks to a Samaritan at the Well, which the disciples frowned on as it was against Jewish practice and culture, which also frowned on talking to a woman alone in public. By the way, this Samaritan woman became the first major evangelist, bringing her whole town to Christ. So no, the text today of Jesus' conversation with a Canaanite is not Jesus being cruel, racist or sexist. It's not that he didn't want to deliver or heal her daughter. Remember in Matthew 8, he asked the Centurion , a non-Jew if he wanted him to heal his servant. Let's take note by all this that Jesus was not just healing and teaching the public. He was disciplining His followers during all of the 3 or so waking years of his public ministry as God incarnate, the Son who came to save the world.

Know this, God is also teaching you and me every single day, every moment he engages us. He is teaching us not to blindly follow a culture, and way of thinking that is actually in opposition to our faith and the values of the Kingdom of God. The Disciples were good people, yet even before Jesus said anything to the

woman, they asked him to dismiss her. We may not be aware of our irrational prejudices, not matter who it's against. Jesus wants to change that in us, so let's listen to him carefully.

Now let me change focus to those on the receiving end of discrimination. There are some who often feel that they are just not good enough because the world says they are not. His engagement with the Canaanite woman is instructive to them too. He knew how she felt about herself. Let's look at the text. She addresses Jesus as "Son of David". By that she was trying to show she was acceptable, or had assimilated by calling him "Son of David", a less used reference to Jesus than "Son of Man" that we often hear in Scripture. A title mainly by those who connected Jesus to Jewish history and it's promise of The Messiah from the line of David. Jesus uses that to seemingly push back, "I came for the lost sheep of Israel. I cannot give the children's bread to those whom Jews consider less-than and non-persons – like dogs." It was like a combat sports trainer, pushing you to the limit, hitting you back or tackling you harder, to make you mad enough to keep playing, keep tackling, keep going forward. Oh and did she rise to the occasion! The provocation! That's what Jesus wants from us. Don't settle for what others define you as. Be relentless as the woman was, "yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off the masters table." She was like a dog with a bone – pun intended. "I'm not going to give in," she thought. Can you hear the resounding voice of Winston Churchill, "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never." from his 1941 commencement speech at a school in London.

With Jesus we are in school every day. No matter our age. No matter our abilities. No matter the season – no Summer break or Spring break. Let the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said will lead us to all truth, school us through this powerful text today! Amen