

## **“Healing Happens”**

*Congregational UCC*

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*Mark 7:24-37*

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I would give anything to have a youtube video of that moment between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman. To see their faces, their expressions right at the moment when this little exchange takes place. Was Jesus angry? Scowling because his labor day weekend at the lake got interrupted? Was he shocked that these people still didn't understand he had come for the sake of true children of God, the Hebrew people? Or was there just a hint of a smile, as though he is acknowledging the prevailing attitudes, repeating what he's heard and mocking them?

We don't know. The youtube video would help – even just that one frame when Jesus says, “it isn't right to throw the filet mignon to the dogs.” Then the woman looks him in the eye and says, “yes but even the dogs get the crumbs from the French bread and the leftover bones.” And all the air is sucked out of the room! Can you even imagine??

I don't know how they treated dogs back then. Have never done the research on that. Being a dog person myself I would hope they treated them ok. “Even the dogs get the crumbs.” Pets in general in our society receive far more than crumbs. Our spending on our pets has quadrupled in recent years.

Whenever there's a story in the news about an abused or abandoned pet, there is an outpouring of help, concern, offers of care. My guess is when there's a sad story about a human, someone homeless perhaps, there are some expressions of compassion but they pale in comparison. We should care for pets, and by and large they are innocent and dependent, and often easier to get along with. When it comes to humans, we start finding reasons almost unconsciously for why we don't need to get too involved or care too much. Sure, sometimes someone's being manipulative or too dependent or dangerous, sometimes the kind of help

someone wants isn't what they really need. Sometimes people refuse all help. Sometimes . . . sometimes. . .

Jesus had at least five really good reasons not to help this woman. For starters she was a SYROPHONOECIAN. What the crowds and disciples would have instantly gotten was that that sounded an awful lot like PHONOECIAN woman. And we ALL know who that was, don't we? That was JEZEBEL - way back in Kings. Queen Jezebel – woman of very ill repute, queen who tried to lure Israelites away from Yahweh. Symbol for many things evil, the desparate housewife of Samaria.

So here is this Syrophoenician woman. Pagan, morally questionable, female, she's got a sick kid so she's even more unclean, and BOLD. She is in Jesus' face! Yes, Jesus had lots of valid reasons, solid justifications for refusing to hear or see her much less actually help her. She's not one of us, she's not from around here, she's got dark skin, where's her husband, why doesn't she get a job. Who does she think she is? And what part of unclean doesn't she understand?

But that's it!! That's the moment. That two second split. That's when the greatest healer the world has ever known encounters a mother in anguish, terrified at the prospect of losing her beloved little child, her daughter. And that's precisely the moment when healing happens. A horrible, wonderful moment. That's the moment when all of the world's prejudices and stereotypes and excuses and justifications crash into a mother willing to endure any abuse, any loss if it will save her child, and it is the world's self-serving attitudes that explode. That's the moment when Jesus heals someone who everyone was quite sure didn't deserve it, hadn't earn it, had no business asking for it. "We really should just watch out for our own," they all had been saying just moments before. "If we help her it just takes away from what we have – we'll all end up paying for it."

The attitudes of the world collide with the mothers who worry about their sick children. The attitudes of self-preservation and "me first" smash up against the husband who lost his family's insurance when he lost his job and now his wife needs surgery. It's not right to throw good food to the dogs. . . But even the dogs . . . even the dogs. . .

Somewhere in these moments, somewhere in this time, Jesus and this brave mouthy woman are expanding exponentially the world's notion of who is deserving of even the most basic

compassion and care and who is and is not a child of God. This is the moment where healing happens.

Someone asked me Thursday night at the town hall meeting, “how do you respond to the people who say this is politics you’re meddling in, you’re crossing a line here?” (Notice they didn’t say they believe that, but other people. . .) And I said that I don’t recall in reading the gospel, any incident where Jesus was approached by a human in need and Jesus stopping and asking, hmm, would you classify this as a political need, or a medical need, or social or spiritual? He just put himself in the middle of it all and that’s when healing happened. He let himself be confronted, cajoled, challenged, used in the cause of healing.

And that’s why I get involved in controversial issues. Not to get into politics or stir up trouble or get on the 11:00 news or try to be Jesus. But actually, for selfish reasons. It’s because I know – I KNOW - that Jesus shows up in those places where prejudice and hatred and fear and misunderstanding run smack into real human pain and need. I want to see what Jesus is going to do now because I know there’s healing just waiting to happen.

I know that when a child, born here, is living with relatives she doesn’t know because her parents were arrested and deported, I have to believe Jesus is working overtime to bring about some healing on some level there and I want to be part of it. Or when a debate about reforming health care turns crazy and ugly on the one hand, and on the other hand I’ve met seniors not taking medicines so they can keep the lights on instead, and those turned down for pre-existing conditions, I know there’s some national healing that Jesus wants for us and from us. And how amazing to be right here in this moment in time, not even needing a youtube video to see the ways Jesus can bring good out of evil if we don’t blow it. This doesn’t mean I see Jesus in a democratic plan or a republican plan. I find evidence of Jesus wherever people demand common sense, where exchanges are dignified, where solutions are sought that work for even the last and the least. Jesus isn’t in the shallows of the soundbites; he’s in the deep end waiting for us to catch up.

Healing happens. In your life and mine. When our own brokenness and neediness meet the One willing to pour Himself out for us. Healing happens when our most cherished prejudices

and excuses and justifications come into full contact with the One whose forgiveness and grace came to encompass the whole world.

Healing happens when we tag along trying our best to follow the One who eats with sinners and pagans and doesn't back away from sick kids and annoying adults and the people others call dogs and lowlife and worse.

Fred Craddock tells the story of a missionary working in India toward the end of World War II. After many long months working there, the time came for him to return home so he made his way to the port city and booked passage on a steamer. His church wired him the money for the ticket. When he got to the port city around Christmas, he saw that a boatload of Jews had been allowed to land there temporarily. This was when European Jews were scattering around the world trying to find somewhere to call home, and not many places wanted to take them in. They were crowding into attics and basements and warehouses in the port city. So on Christmas morning the missionary went to an attic filled with Jews, walked in and said, "Merry Christmas!" They looked at him as if he were crazy. "We're Jews," they replied. "I know that. So what do you want for Christmas?" Stunned, they answered, "why, we'd like good pastries like the ones we used to get in Germany." So the man went and bought as many pastries as he could find and brought them to as many Jews as he could find. Of course this meant he'd spent all his money. So he wired the church asking for more. Naturally, they responded, wanting to know what happened to the money they'd sent. "Spent it on pastries for Jews" he wrote back. "Why did you do that??? They don't even believe in Jesus!" they demanded. "Yes," came his reply, "but I do."

Healing happens when our cherished notions of who God loves and who deserves what collide with the living healing Christ, and Christ wins.

(with gratitude to the Rev. Dirk Ficca for the Fred Craddock story).