

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval, my strength, my rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

From Insults to Empathy and the Refugee Crisis.

Is this what Jesus was, is about? Growth in empathy towards constant inclusion. And today we even hear that Jesus had a hard time with empathy for the other. To the point where he insults this woman. I mean for real, she was a Canaanite, she was a gentile, foreigner, she was a woman, and he was a Jew and he was a man.

It is not clear whether Jesus actually enters Tyre and Sidon or simply goes to the border of the Gentile area. The gospel of Mark says that he entered a house. Matthew does not tell us why Jesus goes to this area. The crowds seem to frustrate his search for solitude, but why would Jesus look for solitude or seek spiritual renewal in a foreign territory? Does God lead Jesus, call his Son to new growth, to empathy, to inclusion, the same way he might call us?

And then the woman, a Canaanite at that. A foreign woman who comes shouting at Jesus, "Have mercy on me Lord, you, son of David. My daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus' own disciples have only once before called him the son of God and now these words are spewing from this foreigner, this woman's lips.

There is complete silence. The disciples want to send her away, their go to answer, just send them away, forget about her. Out of sight, out of mind. Jesus sides with the men, the disciples. "Yes I know. I was only sent to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel. My gosh, what more can a man do. I have a whole nation to save. In fact, it is not even fair, not even fair to take the children's food and throw it away, away to the dogs. Yes, you heard correctly, the insults are flying out of the mouth Jesus.

The Canaanite woman kneels in front of him, gets in his personal space and rages. Jan Richardson has written a poem about this Canaanite woman called,

“Stubborn Blessing.”

“Don’t tell me no. I have seen you feed the thousands, seen miracles spill from your hands like water, like wine, seen you with circles and circles of crowds pressed around you and not one soul turned away. Don’t start with me.

I am saying you can close the door, but I will keep knocking. You can go silent, but I will keep shouting. You can tighten the circle, but I will trace a bigger one around you, around the life of my child, who will tell you no one surpasses a mother for stubbornness.

I am saying I know what you can do with crumbs and I am claiming mine, every morsel and scrap you have up your sleeve. Unclench your hand, your heart. Let the scraps fall like manna, like mercy for the life of my child, the life of the world. Don’t you tell me no.”

This lowly woman, Canaanite, foreign woman bests Jesus, helping him to grow, to grow ever more with empathy and inclusion. She provokes him to the place that awaits him, not simply the savior of Israel, but as the savior of all the world.

This story reminds us that the Church, the earthly body of Jesus is repeatedly taught by people on the margins, the people without power, the people without credentials.

So, who do you hear shouting from the margins. Who do you hear crying for justice. Crying for scraps from the table. Begging for a seat at our table. How do we move beyond our own faithful disciples, our own religion, our own nation?

Home, by Warsan Shire A Somali refugee and poet

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.

you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.
your neighbors running faster than you, the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory is holding a gun bigger than
his body, you only leave home when home won't let you stay.

No one would leave home unless home chased you, fire under feet,
hot blood in your belly. It's not something you ever thought about
doing, and so when you did -you carried the anthem under your breath,
waiting until the airport toilet to tear up the passport and swallow,
each mouthful of paper making it clear that you would not be going back.
You have to understand, no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land.
who would choose to spend days and nights in the stomach of a truck
unless the miles travelled meant something more than journey

I remember one day I heard them say to me they come here to take our
jobs, they need to go back to where they came from
not knowing that I was one of the ones who came. I told them that a
refugee is simply someone who is trying to make a home.
So next time when you go home, tuck your children in and kiss your
families goodnight, be glad that the monsters never came for you.
in their suits and ties. never came for you.
in the newspapers with the media lies. never came for you.
that you are not despised. And know that deep inside the hearts of each
and every one of us we are all always reaching for a place that we can call
home.

So I'd like to share some news with you, that I shared with the council this
week. Actually Paul Lundberg shared the news. There have been people
from both congregations take an interest or may I say they have empathy
for the crisis on the border. We attended a forum via zoom put on by the
Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, the Southwestern Texas Synod of the
ELCA, the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee
Service, and the Texas Border Collaboration Network. A handful of us have
committed ourselves and are just at the very beginning of pursuing
sponsorship for an individual or a family that has a court date for seeking
asylum. This would entail a 6 month to a year commitment, most likely. You
may remember when I said in one of my sermons, that what if we had such
a big project or projects going that we needed help. That we had to ask
people outside our congregations, invite them in, not to increase our
numbers in worship but to help grow the kingdom. Well, as word has gotten
out that is already happening both from people who want to give of their
time and people who want to support this endeavor financially, people that
are not a part of our congregations.

Now my questions to you this morning. Now that you have heard this gospel, this good news today of growth of empathy and inclusion. How will you share it? Will you be silent and pretend this project of sponsoring isn't happening (covid fog)? Will you speak out, like this women, Help! It's not going to be easy. There are a ton of details. Will you react like the disciples, -just go away, or the pharisees - this is totally political leave it alone, we're a church. Or like Jesus. Or like Jesus who responds with growth in empathy, healing, and inclusion. Isn't that what Jesus is telling us about today, growing the kingdom, not just about growing a particular nation, or church.

And I'm not thinking of us BEING Jesus, that we can think we can heal people by some power that we alone have, but I keep thinking about how we have this healing backwards maybe, that real growth, real empathy, real inclusion, not just surviving in our church, but thriving in God's Kingdom is really about how they, the other, the foreigner are healing us. Amen