

“Prophetic Challenge & Dramatic Change”

September 5, 2021
York United Ministries
Recorded at King City United Church
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

Healing God, you do all things well. Illuminate our hearts by your Holy Spirit that we may receive your words and demonstrate your grace. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading

Mark 7:24-31

The Syrophenician Woman repeatedly asks Jesus to cure her daughter. After curing her daughter, Jesus continues to travel to Decapolis.

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸ But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. ³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

This is the Words of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

<Children's Time>

Hello my friends! How are you these days? Are you ready for the new school days? You need to get up early for the school days. Getting up early sounds a little hard? I pre-recorded this, so I will be getting up at 5 a.m. So if you wake up at 7, that's not that bad. Wakey wakey my friends, even Sunday morning to worship God!

Today, I printed some pictures. Here, Jesus is standing in the middle of the crowd. All are men, and a strange and noisy lady approaches Jesus: "Jesus, please cast the demon out of my daughter!" Actually, her daughter was really sick.



Look at Jesus's face: He was really perplexed because a non-Jew woman talked to him. In Jesus's time, Jewish men didn't talk to non-Jewish women. Everyone disliked what she was doing.

And even Jesus didn't like she asked something to him. So Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The woman was so sad because Jesus turned down her



words.

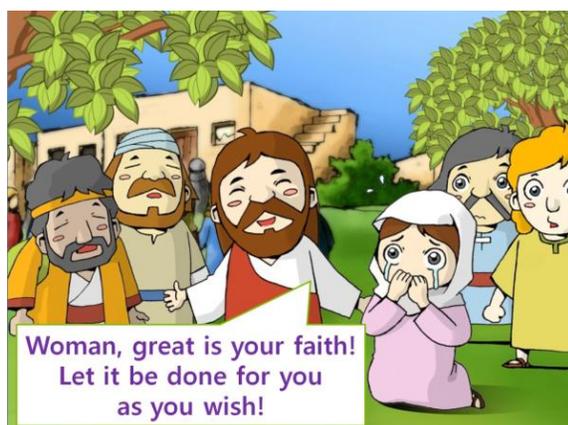


Disciples reminded Jesus that she is gentile, meaning Jesus shouldn't listen to her.



Jesus continued: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dog." It's so devastating. The woman felt so ashamed to hear that. Did she give up to ask? No, she didn't. No, she wasn't able to give up because she had a suffering daughter.

So, she decided not to let him go. She knelt down and asked again: "Even dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs!"



Jesus was moved by what she did and what she said. "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!" When Jesus said that, her daughter was cured of the disease.

Isn't it amazing? She felt rejected but didn't discontinue to ask for what she wanted. She had a pure and humble heart, and that touched Jesus' heart. So, people didn't like to listen to her, but Jesus recognized sincerity. My friends, Jesus loves you and listens to our faithful prayer. What is your prayer? Please do not discontinue your prayer. God is with you. I bless you, my friend.

<Reflection>

Good morning! We are at the beginning of September, but the weather is still hot outside. During the hot days, you know, hydration is very important. Although you are at home, it is essential to drink water even when you are not thirsty. Years ago, I wanted to drink a cup of water on my desk while reading a book. The cup had about 50% of water in it. I unconsciously murmured, “Eh... no more than half.” And Chloe, my first child, instantly interrupted: “No less than half, dad!” “Oh right!” She had the right and positive answer, and I instantly got a lesson from her. Sometimes, you know, kids are good at giving a good sense of wisdom and judgments to their parents, so parents need to be always open to learning from their children.

In the Bible passage, we can see Jesus learns from a Gentile woman. Let’s dive into it. Jesus seemed quite tired, so he went to the region of Tyre and entered a house, wanting to be alone. It was like a “leave me alone” mode. Apart from his wishing, he was involved in a conversation with a woman. Her appearance and accent were noticeably Syrophenician; that is, non-Jew. You know, Jewish men are normally not supposed to talk with Gentile women, but this time, Jesus was not able to escape the situation because her voice and intention toward Jesus were clearer than anyone. Who was she, and what was she doing? Knowing Jesus was near, according to the Bible, she immediately came and bowed at Jesus’ feet. We can assume that she had prepared to request her wish to Jesus because she knew that Jesus had done many miracles in Israel. She had one thing to request, and it was a desperate one. It was not about herself but about her daughter. Can you imagine how desperate she was? And she also knew Jewish men don’t talk to non-Jewish women. So she decided to adopt the humblest attitude to Jesus. She knelt down and begged for her daughter. But Jesus refused her desperate appeal because she was a Gentile: “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

In this context, “dog” is not the state of a child or a family member. The word dog is not from the modern sense of a pet that could sometimes be considered an honorary family member. Jesus is saying, “You have a lower class than Jew, so I won’t

offer any miracle to your daughter.” What mean wording! We are so disturbed by his insulting response to her plea. This is not what we always assume or imagine Jesus, the Son of God with a compassionate heart. How can I accept his rebuff? How can we justify his cold rejection? I learned some interpreters think that Jesus is testing her faith. Of course, in Matthew, he shares this story by adding Jesus’ compliment to the tenacious faith of the woman, saying, “Great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!”¹

And yet, it is not enough to excuse Jesus’ retort as Jesus’s explanation was not pretending to be harsh on her but real. She must’ve felt ashamed due to his despise, but decided to continue asking: “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”² It must probably be the same with our situation when dogs are around the table and get food that falls from it. And we also sense how desperate she was. She was desperately afraid for her daughter’s life.

She must’ve done everything for her daughter, every way, every medicine, and every effort she could’ve made, but it didn’t work. And she knew she could depend on only Jesus for her daughter. “Jesus, my lord, I know I am non-Jew, but cure my daughter! Can she get some crumbs of your power?”

At the moment of her desperate, repeated ask, Jesus had a revolutionary moment: Being surprised at her faith, Jesus was challenged and instantly recognized that ask was not just from her but also from God who loves all the nations. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and at the scene, we find Jesus’ judgment was very human and changed to be fully divine.

“Oh, Rev. Andrew, you are saying Jesus made a mistake, aren’t you? How could this be? Jesus is the Son of God, and he cannot be wrong!”

That’s right. He cannot be wrong. Eventually, he became fully divine and cured the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman. But he was also fully human, so he learned from a prophetic voice from a gentile. The scene of being fully human and fully divine also can be found in Jesus’s prayer on Mt. Gethsemane. Just before being captured

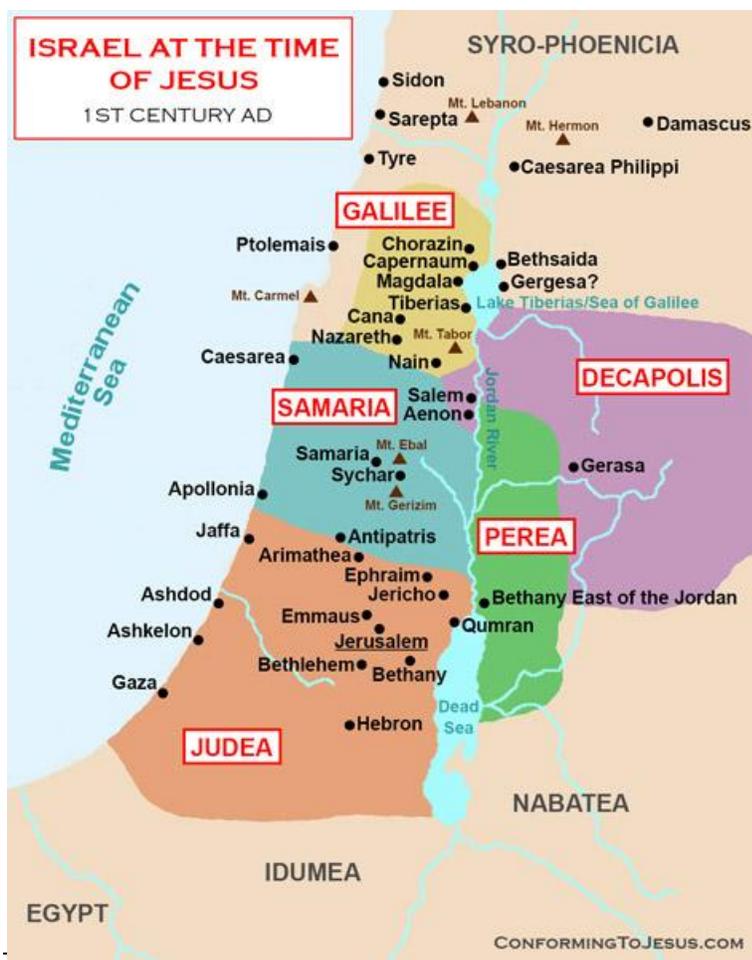
¹ Matthew 15:28.

² Mark 7:28.

and crucified, Jesus prays to God, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” Jesus reveals his weakness and fear through his prayer. It is surely of human. However, he was also fully divine, and he continues, “yet, not my will but yours be done.”³ And he takes his cross as God calls.

Like this way, since Jesus was fully human and fully divine, Jesus recognized God’s call. The challenging voice of the Syrophenician woman became prophetic teaching to Jesus. We can have a clearer vision when we read the last verse of today’s passage. Normally the passage for preaching would end at verse 30, but I intentionally added one more verse: it says,

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.⁴



What? Does it mean anything important? Yes. It’s a thrilling explanation when we know the map. Look at this map: Where is Jesus with the Syrophenician woman? He is in Tyre, and is visiting Jews there. And the woman came from the region of Syrophenicia: it is also a Gentile area. And then, right after visiting Tyre, Jesus was supposed to go back to his base camp in his ministry. Where is his base camp? Galilee. And according to verse 31, Jesus travelled the region of Decapolis.

³ Luke 22:42.

⁴ Mark 7:31.

Jordan River is here, so Decapolis, which is Jordan today, is definitely out of Israel in his time. Jesus travelled a big arc for his ministry.

As soon as the Israelites hear this explanation, they would've instantly known what it meant. This is like, my base camp is in King City, and I travelled downtown Toronto, then went back through Oakville and Brampton. If I wanted to reduce the travel cost, I wouldn't go all the way to Oakville and Brampton. I would take the QEW and HWY 400 North straight. However, if I spend lots of time and money to go to Oakville through Mississauga and Brampton, it must be and should be intentional and with good reasons to do that.

Therefore, this notion that Jesus went from Tyre to Sidon and to Decapolis and went back to Galilee means a huge connotation in Jesus' ministry.

It definitely became intentional after recognizing the prophetic voice. It is such a revolutionary change to Jesus and his ministry.

Jesus, the true human and true God, was challenged; he didn't resist but did accept and change.

Sisters and brothers, when I reflect on the woman and Jesus, two things remain in my heart. Do I have a desperate longing heart for God? At least, do I have tenacious faith in God, like the woman? And, am I fully responsive to divine challenges every day? Every moment in modern days is challenging for modern Christians. Not just from outer pressure but inner conflict and confusion of faithlessness. All the difficulties and failures that we are facing, we, Christians, are called to have the persistent faith of the Syrophenician woman. And we are always being called to open and to respond to the divine challenges in our everyday life. We trust God to lead us to the divine way in the long run. May God be with you and your family members when you are challenged. Let us pray silently.