



## Marginalizing Jesus – Touchpoint for August 16, 2023

### Matthew 15:21-28 (MSG) Healing the People

<sup>21-22</sup> From there Jesus took a trip to Tyre and Sidon. They had hardly arrived when a Canaanite woman came down from the hills and pleaded, “Mercy, Master, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly afflicted by an evil spirit.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus ignored her.

The disciples came and complained, “Now she’s bothering us. Would you please take care of her? She’s driving us crazy.” <sup>24</sup> Jesus refused, telling them, “I’ve got my hands full dealing with the lost sheep of Israel.”

<sup>25</sup> Then the woman came back to Jesus, went to her knees, and begged. “Master, help me.” <sup>26</sup> He said, “It’s not right to take bread out of children’s mouths and throw it to dogs.” <sup>27</sup> She was quick: “You’re right, Master, but beggar dogs do get scraps from the master’s table.”

<sup>28</sup> Jesus gave in. “Oh, woman, your faith is something else. What you want is what you get!” Right then her daughter became well.

**Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

*“It’s not right to take bread out of children’s mouths and throw it to dogs.”*

It’s one of those weird passages in the Bible we’re not sure what to do with. I mean, you almost want to apologize for Jesus and his attitude. It doesn’t fit with what we have been taught about him. It doesn’t fit with what we’ve believed about him. It doesn’t fit with what we profess about him. He is being led by a gentile woman.

Why would Jesus need to be led?

And is it even okay to say that Jesus was ‘led’? Is it okay to say that Jesus was ‘Spirit led’? Because that would imply he didn’t always know where he was going. That would imply he needed direction pointing, at various times in his life.

If Jesus already knew everything that was going to happen, then what’s the point of being Spirit led? You don’t need to be led if you know everything already.

But we have a few different points in the gospels where Jesus is led. Near the beginning of Matthew, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Near the beginning of John, Jesus is led by his mother to change the water into wine, against his initial inclination.

And here in this passage, Jesus is led by a gentile woman, to move in a different direction.

So what does it mean, that a gentile, and a woman, leads Jesus back to himself. returns him to himself?

In both this story and the wedding at Cana story, Jesus’ first impulse is to put principle over people. *“My time has not yet come.” “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*

And it is these two women who point him in a different direction. Return him to his mission of people before principle. Relationship before religion. Love before law. In fact, HIS greatest law is love.

This was his mission and vision. That people came before principles. *“The Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath.”*

So what does it mean, that a gentile, and a woman, leads Jesus back to himself, returns him to himself?

This woman is an outsider to the outsiders. She is lowest of the lows. From a Jewish perspective, being a gentile is the worst. Being a female gentile is the worst of the worst.

And yet it is here, out on the fringes, on the margins, that Jesus is returned to himself. That Jesus is led by the Spirit. It isn't just the woman's daughter who is made whole and healed, Jesus and his mission are made whole by this woman.

That is what it means to be led by the Spirit, doesn't it? To be returned to oneself... one's place within the great Mystery. To find one's home within the greater whole.

And the fact that this story takes place in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory, and it is a gentile woman who leads... well, it is almost too much to comprehend.

Out on the margins, meeting a marginal person... Jesus is touched and led.

Father Gregory Boyle, a Catholic priest who works with gang members in Los Angeles, reflects on this passage by telling the story of someone asking him how he does it. What does he do to reach the gang members and what can this person do to reach them as well?

And Father Boyle replies, “For starters, stop trying to reach them. The question isn't ‘Can you reach them?’ But ‘Can you be reached by them?’”

Father Boyle continues, “And that's exactly what happens in this gospel. Jesus is reached. He's altered. He sees things differently. He's modeling for us how we are supposed to be at the margins... And we locate this exquisite mutuality, where there is no us or them. There's just us... And that's the point... With God and Jesus, we seek to dismantle the barriers that exclude.”

You see, it is when we go out to the margins that the margins get erased.

**We don't go to the margins to make a difference. We go to the margins to be made different.  
We don't go to the margins to find others, we go to the margins to find ourselves.**

We use economic systems to justify and marginalize those who suffer poverty, homelessness, and hunger (“That's just the way the 'free market' works”). We use political systems to justify dominating others and marginalizing them (“To the winner goes the spoils”). We use religious systems to justify ignoring and marginalizing the needs of others or demonizing them (“God is punishing them.” “They deserve every evil thing that comes upon them.” “I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”). We have made the systems we have been raised in more sacred than our fellow siblings of God. And we who have benefited from these systems, we are more than willing to see our brothers and sisters suffer, rather than change one iota of those systems, or ourselves.

And since even Jesus seems to be caught up in this and seduced by it as well, we must recognize its power. These are the powers and principalities that St. Paul talks about, that try to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Separate us not only from a love for ourselves, but separate us from a love for the other. Powers and principalities do not like it when we “love our neighbors as ourselves.” They want to pit us, one against the other.

And so, it is up to one of those on the fringes, to bring Jesus back to himself. It is up to the Spirit, working through one of 'the least of these,' to lead Jesus back to his true calling.

Is there a message here for us? That it's more important to listen to people, especially those on the margins, than to listen to the economic systems, the political systems, and the religious systems in which we have been raised? It is more important to listen to those on the margins than the leaders of those systems or those who have been most successful in them.

Because, after all, if I or others have benefited from our systems of inequality, then I and others have an investment in the continuance of those unequal systems, no matter how broken they might be. Or how much they might hurt the 'other.'

This is what Henry Rojas means when he continually says that people in recovery are the light of the world. If you want to know what's wrong with the world, don't ask the people who have benefited from the brokenness of the world. Ask the people who have been broken by it.

I realize this is blasphemy to everything we hold dear in this country... But what might it mean to live by the idea that systems exist for people, not people for systems? And when those systems fail 'the least of these,' it is the system that needs to be labeled a "FAILURE", not the person. I mean, what if we demanded the system "Get its act together," rather than people?

And so, at its core, following in the footsteps of Jesus attacks every economic, political and religious system, by elevating people above principle.

This is what Jesus means when he says that all the laws of the scribes and prophets rest on the law of LOVE. Love of God and love of neighbor. They are one and the same. You can't say you love and follow God, and then let your neighbor suffer. That's one of the major points of the parable of the Good Samaritan and its damning indictment of the actions of the religious leaders as opposed to the actions of the Good Samaritan.

**We don't go to the margins to make a difference.  
We go to the margins to be made different.**

Let me share with you how this has played out in my own life. When I lived in Japan, I lived in a town of 150,000 people. I was the only Caucasian. So to say the least, I was on the fringes, I was the minority. The word for 'foreigner' in Japanese is 'gaijin'. It literally means 'Alien'. 'Alien', not foreigner. 'Alien', from another planet, another existence.

And because I was the on the fringes, I had to be very observant of the ways of the Japanese, to fit in as best I could. I had to know the ways of the Japanese to survive. And I would sometimes ask the Japanese why they did things the way they did. And sometimes they were surprised by the question, because they didn't even realize they were doing things a certain way. It was so baked into their system they didn't even recognize it. But as an outsider, I did.

It's like the story of the two young fish swimming downstream, and an old fish swimming upstream. And as they pass each other, the older fish says to the younger fish, "How's the water upstream, boys?" The two young fish look at each other for a second, hesitate, and then say, "Fine, it's all fine." The old fish replies, "Great," and continues on his way. After he is gone, the one young fish turns to the other and says, "What is water?"

Sometimes, we are blind to the water in which we swim.

One example:

A few years back, I was sitting with two very successful professional women who had just retired. Both had won awards in their industry. I was listening to their stories, not saying much. They got onto the subject of how they had been discriminated against, marginalized and dismissed. They talked about how hard it was for them to be heard in a roomful of men. Amongst other things, it was enlightening, frightening and damning all at the same time. I realized I had spent my professional life swimming in waters I didn't understand.

Look, if Jesus is willing to listen, and be changed and led by one who lives on the margins, shouldn't we? Men, have you ever sat down and listened to a professional woman's story, or any woman for that matter? Have any of you ever listened to a minority person's story, or the story of a person of a different sexual orientation? Have you ever sat down and said to anyone who is different from you, "Tell me your story"? And then just listened.

Zadie Smith once said, "I think the hardest thing for anyone is accepting that other people are as real as you are. That's it. Not using them as tools, not using them as examples or things to make yourself feel better or things to get over or under. Just accepting that they are absolutely as real as you."

Jesus was changed by one on the fringe, who was different from him. He, and his ministry and mission were made whole by this woman even as he healed and made whole her daughter.

It is by the people on the margins that we are changed, healed, and made whole, as Jesus was.

I think this part of what Jesus is getting at when he says, "I was hungry and you fed me. Thirsty and you gave me drink. In prison and you visited me."

So let me conclude with the first verse of the song we are about to hear:

*Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?  
**Will you go where you don't know, and never be the same?**  
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?*

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)  
Be Still, know that I am God

### To Everything There is a Season

(The Concordia Choir, Rene' Clausen)

To everything turn, turn, turn. There is a season turn, turn, turn.  
And a time for every purpose under Heaven A time to be born, a time to die.  
A time to plant, a time to reap. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to laugh, a time to weep. *Refrain*  
A time to build up, a time to break down. A time to dance, a time to mourn.  
A time to cast away stones. A time to gather stones together. *Refrain*  
A time of love, a time of hate. A time of war, a time of peace.  
A time you may embrace. A time to refrain from embracing. *Refrain*  
A time to gain, a time to lose. A time to rain, a time to sow.  
A time for love, a time for hate. A time for peace, I swear it's not too late.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### Will You Come and Follow Me (The Summons)

(John L. Bell, The Cathedral Singers)

Will you come and follow me, If I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know,  
And never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind,  
And never be the Same? Will you risk the hostile stare, Should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see, If I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free, And never be the same? Will you kiss  
the leper clean, And do such as this unseen, And admit to what I mean, In you and you in me?  
Will you love the 'You' you hide, If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside,  
And never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found, To reshape the world around,  
Through my sight and touch and sound, In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true, When you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you,  
And never be the same. In your company I'll go, Where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow, In you and you in me.

## The Meal

### Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, Salisbury Cathedral Boys Choristers, Salisbury Cathedral Lay Vicars, David Halls)

## Benediction

### God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again

(Discovery Singers)

God be with you till we meet again; By his counsels guide, uphold you; With his sheep securely fold you.  
God be with you till we meet again. Amen