

She is one amazing woman!

This is one unbelievable story, and quite a shocking one too! In a way, you might expect it never to have entered the Bible, but here it is, in two versions -this one in Mark, and then in Matthew 15. I absolutely love it, perhaps because it is so surprisingly unexpected, and by being that way invites us to reflect on who we are and how we respond to the needs of others we encounter, and as it caught Jesus by surprise, then what can we expect.

Before you continue reading this, please take a good look at the picture. Look at this woman, her face, her eyes. What can you see?



I see defeat. I see deep sadness. I see suffering. She's desperate for the health of her child, and what must she have done in the past to help her? How many times has she been rejected, insulted, despised? That face tells us of her life story. And it has made me think of the despair of so many women today – Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Haiti, Ethiopia, Myanmar... Women broken by war, violence, hunger, rape, discrimination. Women who no longer a living, but simply existing. Too many women today look like her. She is not a mystery, she is real, painfully real.

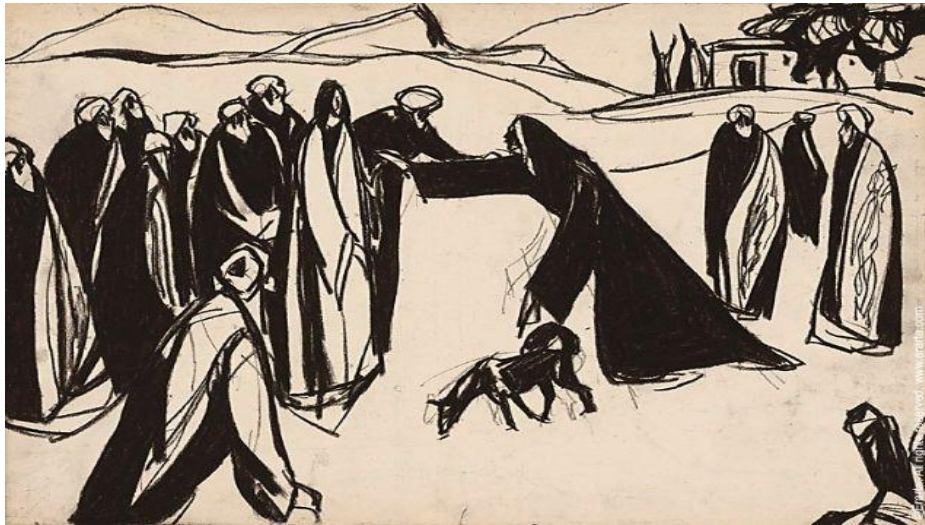
This woman is an outsider, through nationality and religious belief – a Syrophenician and a gentile. All we know of her is she is desperate mother of a demon-possessed daughter.

Jesus moves outside his home territory, he is hoping for some rest, for privacy, and goes to Tyre and is staying in this house. And into this house goes this woman, she falls at his feet recognising his role, and she **begs** for her daughter. Could the scene that follows present us with Jesus at his most human, with the social upbringing of every other man of his time? I believe this could well be the case.

Jesus' response is striking and off putting, we are not expecting this, because we know Jesus has cured foreigners before, he doesn't speak to Jairus as he speaks to this woman (read chapter 5 to see this). So why does Jesus refuse her request with this offensive comment? I don't think the woman was hearing this for the first time -being rejected and called a dog. But it shocks us – this is not what we expect from Jesus. But – if we can feel tired and come out nasty, can't Jesus?

Jesus was a man of his time, and he knew it was a man's responsibility to look after his family, and it would seem this woman doesn't have a man to do this, that is why she must face all this alone, even if that makes her come across as out of place.

Look at the second illustration now...



Its stark, its abrupt. It brings out the pain. But – this is one amazing woman, who will do all that is needed for her daughter, except take **NO** for an answer, and she contests Jesus' words. "Even if in your sight my daughter and I are dogs, I believe you can still heal her, so please do so". And Jesus is stopped in his tracks (and so are we). Nothing like this has ever happened to him before, he suddenly changes - his harshness is transformed, and he replies: "For such a reply, you may go...your daughter is cured". He is not cross, he is not offended, he is different – from a NO a loving YES.

The woman knows the way the world works, and she has just questioned it. She has challenged the cultural/social assumptions and has changed them. She has taught Jesus to be able to see things in a different way: **nothing should stand in the way of doing good to those in need**, even a woman, a foreigner. NOTHING. NOBODY. This reading takes my breath away!

And then it questions us – what is our responsibility towards all those people who are despised and rejected in the world today? Those who have nobody to care for them. Those who are so easily call dogs.... We can learn the facts about the lives of people who have no choice and seek refuge in other countries. We can stop false stories being spread. We can speak kind words to others. We have recently seen the disasters of climate emergency so we can certainly seek new ways to me more environmentally friendly. We have recently seen the pain in the eyes of those left in dangerous situations, so we can support Amnesty International, the Harbour Project, the Desai project. We can live the values of faith over the values of empty politics.

Jesus reminds us that even amid challenges to what we consider basic life, compassion must be turned into action. This is what Jesus does, this is what the woman demands. This is the way forward, so on this way we walk. It is the only way forward for us as children of God. Amen

*Take this moment, sign and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where Your love is found.*