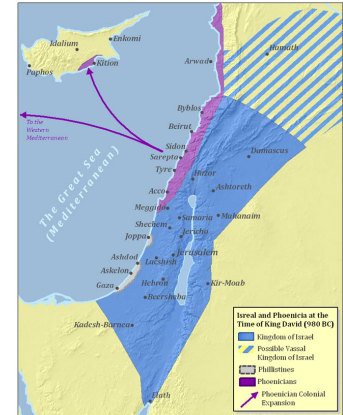


This morning we are continuing our series titled, “Personal Jesus” where we are looking at some of the conversations Jesus had with individual people to learn about his relational nature and understand what it means for us to be in a relationship with Jesus. The series title actually comes from a song by that name that was written and recorded by Depeche Mode, a British new wave pop band with a strong synthesizer sound and dance beats. Martin Gore, the member of the band who is credited with writing this song – and most of their songs – says, “[**Personal Jesus**] is a song about being a Jesus for somebody else, someone to give you hope and care.”ⁱ That’s pretty darn good theology, actually. The song has been covered by a number of artists since, including Johnny Cash, and it is actually that rendition, by an artist known mostly as a country musician though he certainly crossed borders into other musical realms...but nonetheless, it’s the country singer Johnny Cash whose recording of the song inspired me to the series title. It’s the only copy of the song I own. Now, you know my views on Country music. So I want all of you country singers to take note of this, that this entire series is named after a country music song. I’ll have a jar for tips next to me after the service! 😊

Anyway, I mention all this today, a few sermons into this series, because Johnny Cash was, in many ways, kind of like the woman we read about today: an Outsider. He was far from perfect, struggling with drugs, and other issues in his life. And yet he had a personal relationship with Jesus that profoundly impacted him and his 35-year marriage to June Carter until her death in 2003. He died four months later at the age of 71. But he was, in many ways, an outsider.

The woman in today’s passage was equally an outsider in many ways, and probably even more so. We don’t know much about her except what’s stated here in the passage and in Matthew’s gospel account where he also records this event for us. If you look at Matthew’s recording of it – beginning in Mt. 15:21 – you’ll see that Matthew says she was a Canaanite. Mark says she was born in Syrian Phoenicia, which raises the obvious question: Is one

of them a poor historian, and wrong about her? And the bigger question raised in our minds then is: are the authors untrustworthy? These are crucial questions to answer so we can know whether or not to trust the biographies of Jesus, and of course the rest of the Bible as well. **Map Here.** So what's going on here is that the region of Tyre was part of the Roman Empire at this time. But a couple thousand years earlier, it was the region where the Canaanites had moved into, when conquered by Joshua and the Israelites. So they moved northward, out of the land that Joshua led the Jews into, and that northern region became known as Canaan, and it's people the Canaanites.



<http://explorethemed.com/IAIsrael.asp?c=1>

So what's happening is that she was Canaanite by heritage, but lived in what at the time was Syrian Phoenicia. When you look deeper into the gospels of Matthew and Mark, it's evident that they're targeting different audiences – Matthew's is more Jewish, and Mark's is more Greek – and their description of this woman fits with what their target audience would understand best – Mark calls her Syro-Phoenician, Matthew calls her a Canaanite.

And Jesus has come into her region, probably to get some rest, away from Israel where it was difficult for him to get away from people. This is the only time in Jesus' public ministry that he leaves Israel – he goes through Samaria a time or two, but that was kind of a subset region of Israel; it wasn't a foreign country. When verse 24 says "he entered a house and did not want anyone to know it" it was probably the home of a Jewish person who was living there where he hoped to take refuge for a few days, get some down time, get a breather, maybe to even distance himself from the Pharisees and the conflict he kept finding himself in with them.

Just before this, in fact, Jesus got into a pretty harsh verbal conflict with the Pharisees where He calls them hypocrites and then quotes a passage from Isaiah that he applies to the Pharisees, **"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules"** (Mark 7:6-7, Isaiah 29:13). This is his

response to them about keeping food purity laws, and then he invites the crowds around to listen even further and he basically says, “Eat whatever you want. Food isn’t what defiles you. Food isn’t what makes you unclean. It’s your hearts that are contaminated.” So the Pharisees have got to be pretty ticked off about this – Jesus calls them hypocrites and then makes a show of their faulty thinking in front of a crowd of people. Not exactly helping them to save face.

And at that point, it appears that Jesus says to himself: I need to get out of dodge. I need a break. I need to protect myself or I’m gonna get strung up by my toes.” Jesus isn’t being meek here. You know the phrase, “Discretion is the better part of valor”? Jesus embodies that here. He’s fought with them verbally, now it’s time to flee from them, catch his breath, and get some rest. So he heads out of Israel to the vicinity of Tyre.

Look, if Jesus needs rest...if Jesus needs to escape the pressures of life occasionally – and we see him seeking solitude at other times, too – **If Jesus needs that rest, how much more do we need it at times, too?** We need down time. And just relaxing, focusing on hobbies or activities or people that energize us and help us be restored is all good. But we need down time that brings us into a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father...that draws us closer to Jesus the Son...that helps us reconnect with the Spirit of God that lives inside us. Frequently in the gospels, we see Jesus getting alone time to connect with His Heavenly Father

At the end of June my family went to a Christian Family camp for the better part of a week. We went to a camp called Mount Hermon, near Santa Cruz, just south of San Francisco, which means we were really being very Jesus-like, because let’s be honest: going to California is like going to a foreign country. California is just that different from Western Washington. But the whole week was so refreshing, in a variety of ways. But the best way was the spiritual refreshment we got. I got to sit in worship, with my family, two times a day, and hear sermons besides my own. Which means: I finally got to hear some good sermons! I didn’t have to worry about how things sounded, if people were going to remember their parts in the service (including myself!), or if the video illustration in the middle of the sermon would work

ok...I could simply focus on my own relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and my family did the same thing. And in doing that together, we all grew in our relationship with one another. It was great. **And we need those times of refreshment, where we can get away from the pressures of life and get centered on God. If Jesus needed it, so do we.** We don't have to go to a foreign country...or out of state...or even out of the city where we live. But it does help to get to a setting where we won't be faced with all the usual daily challenges, and I would encourage you to do exactly that on occasion – on your own, at our annual men's retreat or women's retreats, a Walk To Emmaus weekend, or something else that you come across – there are lots of options! But set aside some time every once in a while for a lengthier period of refreshment and connecting with God.

So that's what Jesus does. But even here, his reputation precedes him, and this woman approaches him to seek healing for her daughter. And this is one of the most fascinating conversations Jesus has. In fact, it might be *the* most fascinating one. Jesus replies to her with an answer that amounts to “no.” The metaphor of dogs under that table might sound to our ears as being a bit harsh, but it doesn't seem to bother her. It probably was related to a familiar idiom or proverbial statement of the day. But that's his answer. **While he doesn't say why “no” is his initial answer, we can surmise that it's a matter of his mission and the timing.** Jesus' mission was first to the Jewish people. Now, it wasn't only for them. Jesus invites anyone to take up their cross and follow him as Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record him saying. The Good News of Jesus is for the whole world as he says in John 3:16. Jesus really is good news for everyone which is why this answer he gives is a bit confounding.

But his mission, while he walked the face of the earth, was to focus on the Jewish people. That's where he invested almost all of his time. This week, in a daily e-mail news thing I subscribe to, I came across an article that was titled, “11 Secrets of Small Business Success.” Two of the points are exactly what Jesus is doing here. 1) “Line up customers before you open your doors. Sometimes it means starting small – being a home chef before a caterer, a food truck before a restaurant.” 2) “Keep your customers. This seems obvious, but all too often, small businesses spend a lot of time

attracting customers and not very much time retaining them. Serve current clients well. Stay in touch with them.” So, while anyone can follow Jesus and be His disciple, his mission for the three years of his ministry was shaped by these two principles. He had a “customer base” lined up before he began: That’s the people of the Jewish faith. And he did everything he could to keep those “customers.” That’s his 3-year mission. **The expansion of that mission to then reach out into the rest of the world begins later, even though he planted seeds of it in what he taught about “anyone” and “the world” being invited to follow Him.** So, initially, with this woman, it’s “no.” And by the way, even though “no” sounds kind of harsh, Jesus says harsh things to others as well, and as we looked at a few weeks ago, his response to Lazarus’ sickness and the request for Jesus to come visit him was met with a 2 or 3 day wait before Jesus went, in which time Lazarus ended up dying. So, Jesus doesn’t always give us the answer we want right away, and sometimes it’s a difficult thing for us to hear.

But the woman doesn’t go down without a fight – and a sense of humor. Her response is awesome. She doesn’t dismiss his answer, or get in a huff over it...and she doesn’t get into an argument with him over it, either. She essentially affirms him with her response, “Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs” (Mark 7:28). We’ve been dog-sitting for my mother-in-law the last couple weeks, watching her labradoodle, Gracie. And every time we go to sit at the dining room table for a meal, she’s there, under the table, or right next to it, waiting to pounce on anything that falls off the table. Heck, even when we’re cooking in the kitchen or just munching on a snack, she’s waiting for something to fall to the ground. And inevitably, she gets a few morsels. So this woman highlights a truth and applies it to this situation. Touché, right?

And this is a response that virtually no one else with whom Jesus interacted could get away with. Certainly not anyone back in Israel, because they’re “the children.” They’re already at the table. Heck, the Pharisees thought they owned the table and had an inherent right to be there and it was their job to determine who got to come to the table. Others in the Jewish community recognized they were the children at the table, but would have had more humility to realize they were there only by God’s grace...that

it was a gift. But no one in the Jewish community would consider themselves the dogs under the table in this metaphor. So this gal is in a bit of a unique position compared to the people Jesus was usually around.

And Jesus is impressed with her response. He recognizes a witty reply when he hears it. So, He gave her a tip of the cap, and says that the demon has left her daughter. She's healed. And sure enough, she goes home, and her daughter is well.

One of the interesting things about this is that the miracle is completely minimized. It's really not the highlight of the whole thing. Jesus doesn't even go to see the girl – he just does it and proclaims it as done. Nothing to it. The whole focus here is really on the conversation. And it makes you wonder, “Couldn't he have just done in the first place?” Most Biblical scholars see Jesus testing her some here...finding out where her faith really is. And she articulates pretty clearly that even she – and maybe others in the region as well – has gotten wind of Jesus' teaching...gotten some crumbs that have fallen off the table...and she believes Jesus can heal her daughter, and probably wrapped up in her response – or maybe their conversation was a little more than what we have here – ...but somehow she communicated that she has a deeper understanding of who Jesus is: not just a healer and miracle worker who offers something that we consume like, but He's Lord and Savior, someone to follow and emulate and devote our lives to.

The final thing I want to comment on, and it takes us back to what I started with, is that in light of the climate in our country around foreigners coming here, seeking refuge, and so forth, it's interesting to see here that: **Jesus actually leaves the comfort of his homeland and seeks refuge elsewhere, and then ministers to one of them who was not only different theologically, but because of her gender – as we saw last week as well – was lower on the socio-economic scale as well.** And this isn't the first time Jesus took refuge in a foreign country, as his family fled Israel soon after he was born because of persecution, and went to Egypt. In today's passage it's more of an elective choice he makes. But that doesn't change who the woman is or the differences between the two of them. She's a total outsider to the Jewish faith, at least in terms of lineage. She's not an Israelite. And as a

woman, that puts her down a rung on the ladder as well. But none of those things are barriers to Jesus ministering to her. The Good News of Jesus really is for anyone who would take up their cross and follow Him.

Fortunately for her, and for us, our nationality and our racial heritage do not matter to Jesus. It's not an obstacle for Him because he was sent to the whole world so that all who believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. Anyone is invited to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. That's the big picture of God's mission in Jesus. How about us? Do we let obstacles like a person's race, their gender, their socio-economic status, their habits, their tattoos or ear piercings, their educational level...all the stuff that's different from what you or I might consider normal...do we let those things become an obstacle to relationships with people, to ministering to them, to going to them...let alone welcoming them into our midst?

For all the fun I like to have in sermons with cultural things like what university you root for, or what kind of music you like...those things don't matter in the end, either. **Jesus shows us here, and we see it in the rest of the New Testament as the gospel spreads far and wide, that the gospel does not stop at borders.** It crosses them. It breaks down walls, it welcomes people in and invites them into a conversation and a relationship with Jesus, to find rest for their own souls, rest for what troubles and worries them. In fact, we would do well to remember that all of us here – or certainly most all of us – would also be “dogs under the table” were we to just travel back in time and plant our American selves at Jesus' feet.

And yet we have that healing and that rest that Jesus offers. Most of us here this morning know that “rest” in our lives. We've found the peace that passes all understanding because Jesus has welcomed us and ministered to us and continues to do so. Let's continue to find our rest in him, and invite others to do the same, no matter who they are or where they come from – because Jesus wants that personal relationship with them, as he does with you and me. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱFox, Marisa (4 July 1990). "Pop a la Mode". Spin. 6 (4)., as quoted at Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_Jesus#cite_note-10