

Daily Devotional, October 13, 2020 Do What is Right, Follow Jesus' Example

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." 27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV)

What seems to be a regular practice of many food pantries is that when canned vegetables are donated, is to ask if the cans have labels and if they are expired. If they don't meet those requirements, the cans should be thrown away. The food pantry doesn't accept them and no one should really eat them. In many cases those familiar words that anyone who has ever worked at a food bank or food pantry has heard are: "If those people who are in need are really hungry, they will eat anything that is offered."

I suppose it is true that if I were on a deserted island much like Tom-Hanks-in the movie Cast-Away, that yes, I would eat expired canned vegetables of unknown origin. But, this is suburban Chicago, a fairly affluent area of this world. There is really no reason any of our neighbors should be so hungry that they would need to eat expired castoffs. Anyone *that* hungry should be invited to a place at the table to have a nutritious meal.

I am told by those who work in pantries that if they should tell those trying to donate such food at the pantry, that they will say to you, "I just hate to see food go to waste, and the dates are just suggestions anyway." While it is one thing to feel terrible about food waste, and it is also true that some food can be safely eaten for a short period beyond its expiration, it is quite another to ask the poorest people or the most down in their luck individuals in our communities to feel blessed by the wanton crumbs that we are willing to drop. The best thing a person can do as they toss those cans into the trash is to take a moment to ponder how they became so blessed that they can allow cans of food to expire in the back of their pantry (sometimes years beyond expiration) without a second thought, until a global pandemic affords them the time to clean out and "feel bad."

In the scripture verses from Matthew today, Jesus and the disciples do not seem to be particularly kind to the Canaanite woman. They put her off, ignore her, tell her to pipe down, and Jesus even says that people "like her" are not part of his mission. In a sense, it is as if they are offering her the expired, unlabeled vegetables from the back of the pantry and hope she will stop complaining and badgering them.

But this fearless woman tells them the truth: "You treat dogs better than you treat me." And immediately, Jesus admits to her that she is right. The savior of the world was forced to admit to a woman that she was right. And you know what? Admitting to this did not diminish His authority or His power. In fact, it expanded and grew His ministry by proving that He was who He said he was, as He was even able to cure the Canaanite woman's daughter from a distance. Do you think for

one minute that out of great joy, this woman did not go out and proclaim this great miracle all throughout the region? She may have become the first Canaanite evangelist!

There is no shame on behalf of Jesus in this story. In fact, I believe that this was nothing more than a teaching moment for His disciples. Jesus used this Gentile woman's belief in Him to show them that he was sent primarily for the Jews, but that His love and salvation were available to all people. It was especially available to those who believed in His healing and saving powers.

You know, It isn't weak to admit that we haven't done enough to help others. It isn't a failure to identify our complicity in oppressive systems. These kinds of admissions are the first step to healing our brokenness and the brokenness of broken systems. None of us will be whole until all of us are whole. It is up to us to see the failures and to fix what is broken and to heal what is unhealthy and lies outside of God's perfect plan.

Gracious Lord, give us ears to hear the critiques. Give us eyes to see those who are crying for relief from oppressive systems. Forgive our shame of complicity and overwhelm us with a desire to work for justice. Amen.