

Bible reading: Matthew 15:(10-20),21-28

Speaking up

THIS WEEK WE EXPLORE THE VOICES OF THE MARGINALISED OR EXCLUDED.

Jesus has two tricky encounters, first with the Pharisees, then with a Canaanite woman, that seemed to be linked by food. In fact, the link is deeper – faith and membership of God's people – and the outcome of the encounters is something of a surprise.



Write

Think about a person who is completely different to you, perhaps someone who faces discrimination, someone displaced by war or disaster, or someone from another country. Write a prayer from that person's point of view, imagining yourself in their position. What might you say to God, thank God or ask God for?

WATCH



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLFEvHWD_NE
Watch this clip about Keala Settle finding the courage to sing the 'This Is Me' anthem from *The Greatest Showman*. The song marks when Barnum's circus performers – people on the edges of society – dare to stand up to be seen and heard. Sing along if you like! Whose voices should Christians be listening to right now?

REFLECT

Is it true that 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me'? Gather a pile of small stones along with a large bowl of water. Think about hurtful names or insults that have been hurled at you. Or offensive names you see or hear regularly. Pick up a stone for each one, hold it over the bowl and say 'child of God' as you release the stone into the water – creating a sign of God's love for everyone in our society.

Bible notes



Uncleanness cuts people off from God. As the poles of a magnet repel one another, so God's purity is repelled by uncleanness. That image lies at the heart of the Pharisees' concern with uncleanness, which provides the context for today's reading. The chapter begins with an argument about washing hands before eating that revolves round the potential for uncleanness, not modern thinking about hygiene. Jesus discusses this with his disciples at verses 10-20. As elsewhere in this Gospel (e.g. 5:21-22), he relocates concern for purity from outside to inside the person. It is evil thoughts, leading to evil actions, that corrupt someone. The story that follows (cf. Mark 7:24-30) could be seen as an 'enacted parable' revealing the truth of Jesus' teaching through an opposite example. The setting is north of Israel, in the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon. Matthew identifies the woman as a Canaanite, a group that was a traditional enemy of Israel (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:1). For that reason and because of her gender, observant Jews would have seen her as likely to be unclean. From running after Jesus and the disciples (v.23), she then kneels in front of him, physically obstructing him (v.25). The disciples, and even Jesus himself, regard her as a nuisance. Yet the words that come from her lips reveal the purity of her heart. She addresses Jesus like a disciple, calling him 'Lord' three times, and using words similar to Peter's call for help (v.25, cf. 14:30). She is quick to challenge his rejection, perhaps reminding Jesus of God's promise to Abram that 'through you, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:3). Jesus addresses her respectfully (v.28) and heals her daughter. Has he just recognised the truth of what he said earlier? If impure thoughts lead to impure words, then words can also reveal purity of heart – and so the woman receives God's inclusive blessing.

First impressions

- When have you felt compelled to speak up, no matter what the consequences?
- What different or marginalised voices could you be better at listening to?
- How could your church be more welcoming to groups that might feel excluded?



A sending out prayer

O God, you open your arms wide to all of us.
Help us trust that you really do love us,
the real deep-down us, warts and all.
Nothing we can do can stop you loving us.
If, like the Canaanite woman, we dare to believe,
may your healing love flow through us to the hurting,
so we may hear singing in heaven!

Amen.

Read



Read 'A tapestry of colour' article by Chine McDonald that talks about this passage, Scripture and racism. What strikes you as you read the article? Think about which of Chine's 'next steps' would make a positive impact in your church context. <https://reverendally.org/tag/canaanite-woman/>