

**Christ the Lord Episcopal Church    Pinole, CA**  
**The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: September 8, 2024**

“Jesus of the Flesh”

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Good morning and welcome to the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost and the very famous story of the Syrophenician woman. There are important considerations in this story that I believe often get overlooked.

Most sermons include that Jesus eventually listens to a woman who is completely below his status, because she is a non-Jewish female, and approached him with no male representative. However, rather than the old familiar route, I want to focus on Jesus and his humanity and ability to not sin. For it is in Jesus' humanity that we find salvation.

First, we must clarify that to sin is to miss the mark of loving God and neighbor. If I hold a grudge, refuse to forgive, am biased to the point of acting on those prejudices, or am self-seeking, these are all forms of sin that are part of our everyday lives. So, let's take a look at Jesus in today's reading.

He is tired and looking for a place to rest. He had just finished with the last crowd and multiple healings, and I can imagine he just desired some space to himself. It seems that Jesus is exhausted and seeking some “down time,” as he “entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice.” Even in this gentile region, away from the synagogues and Temple, it seems that word has spread about Jesus. He cannot escape demands for his healing power.

In last week's gospel text, Jesus took to task the Pharisees and scribes for their ideas of "purity" and their judgment of those who did not conform to their standards of piety. Now, as if to prove his point, Jesus heads off into "impure" territory, in the gentile region of Tyre. And lo and behold, he is tempted and tested. Yes, even Jesus, the man, was tested (as we are) not to ever stop loving God and neighbor. But the reality is - it is human to do so. And yet in his exhaustion he almost does what he just rebuked the Pharisees for: stating that his good will is only for the Jews.

Jesus' response is harsh. How could he say such a thing? He appears to be quoting a bit of Jewish folk wisdom, but that does not lessen its sting. Some interpreters propose that Jesus is testing the woman to tease out her affirmation of faith. Others propose that here we see the very human side of Jesus, exhausted and needing a break, or perhaps not yet understanding the scope of his own mission.

I think this is a very important piece to note. We praise Christ, but Christ is the Risen Divine Son of God. Jesus incarnate, in the flesh, became weary just as we do. I think we need to be very clear that unlike a superhero on a film screen, the human Jesus was continually tested as we are. This is the "way" of Jesus on full display.

We like to put Jesus on a pedestal. But more importantly, we need to understand just what lessons God wants us to know. We all know when we are tired, we may say some harsh things. We all know it is much easier to be kind to someone who thinks, looks, and acts like us. We all would, at times, like to just be left alone to

quiet ourselves after a rough day. Well, the same was true for Jesus. Are you surprised?

While we cannot know exactly what Jesus was thinking, it is clear, that when approached by the Syrophenician woman, Jesus' immediate response was to appeal to the limits of his mission; his call to serve his own people. Do we do that sometimes? Do we just do it because we have always done it that way? It is easier to just go with the tradition than to have to come up with a new way, a change, a challenge. Jesus is experiencing the same thoughts we often do.

I will admit that the woman was clever and committed to her cause which served her well. Because in reality, and because of who Jesus was, he, Jesus can only agree that God's love and healing power knows no ethnic, political, or social boundaries. "So, she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone"

From Tyre, Jesus heads off to the region of the Decapolis, also gentile territory. Perhaps he is still seeking to escape notice and to rest a bit, or perhaps, after his experience with this woman, he has a new vision of his mission beyond the borders of his home territory. In any case, once again escaping notice proves impossible as, "They brought to him a deaf man who also had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to lay his hand on him."

Like the Syrophenician woman, this man too is an outsider. He is cut off from the world by his inability to hear and communicate with others. This time Jesus does not hesitate to respond to a desperate request, though he does take the man aside, away from the crowd.

Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in worship and praising Jesus, not fully understanding that it is in his and our struggles and humanity we find Jesus' saving grace to us. When we pray, he understands and intercedes. This also says a lot about having faith and an easy life. We all have tests and struggles behind and before us. We are mortal; we are human, but with an eternal Divine Spark.

Yet, Jesus, took a breath before he spoke to the woman, and did not sin. He did not stray from loving God and neighbor, or maybe we should say "loving the stranger." He practiced what he preached even from the very human level of just being plain old tired. At the end of the story, Jesus praises the woman's faith and her daughter is healed. She does receive the gift of salvation. We are all included in this gift, no matter what our nationality, ethnicity, or social status. Today is a reminder to take that breath, quiet your mind and do good, even when it is sometimes difficult, as Jesus demonstrates.

For those who identify more easily with the Syrophenician woman begging for crumbs, it must be said that Jesus does not leave any of us in a state of beggarliness. He seats us at the table and claims us as God's beloved children — children from every tribe and language and nation. He also opens our ears to hear his word, and opens our mouths to proclaim the Gospel. Even crumbs from His table would be enough for our healing and salvation. But Jesus has given more than enough. He sets an abundant, life-giving feast for all because it is through his humanity that we can become closer to his divinity. Amen