

## A Monday Morning: Sunday School in 10

The following is a basic Sunday School lesson for this Monday's Stirrings. The Scripture, I have selected for the basis of this instruction, is next Sunday's Scripture reading: Matthew 15: 21-28. Because everyone encounters the Word differently, I am suggesting some paths to understanding: meditative, "book learning", active and visual. Hopefully each will only take you 10 minutes. Please feel free to contact me by email or phone (716-860-1898) for clarification, conversation, feedback, etc....

### MEDITATIVE

Based on the ancient prayer practice of Lectio Divina, you will be praying the passage using these 5 prompts.

1. Read Matthew 15:21-28. What should everyone who reads this passage know or understand?
2. Think deeply about what this passage says to you today. What is the lesson here? What do you learn about the woman? About Jesus? About the disciples? About each one's attitude?
3. Have a simple conversation with God about what you read and how it affected you.
4. Consider this question: What conversion of the mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of me?
5. What will you do now because you have been inspired by God?

"BOOK LEARNING" from Brian Stoffregen (<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt15x10.htm>) [I am quoting a portion of Rev. Stoffregen's exegesis on the passage, please see the link for further commentary]

*The entire section of Matthew 15:1-28 is concerned with ritual purity -- who is clean/unclean and what makes them that way? (15:1-9 do not occur in the lectionary.) There is a connection from beginning to end with the word artos = "bread". Unfortunately, this Greek word is usually left untranslated in v. 2b: "For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." It is a key image in Jesus' conversation with the Canaanite woman, v. 26 and in the feeding stories before and after our text: 14:17, 19; 15:33, 34, 36. (Note also its use in 16:5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12).*

*The Canaanite woman is described by Jesus as having a "great faith" (v. 28). This is the only occurrence of that adjective describing faith in Matthew. Yet, she didn't walk on water, as Peter did last week. She didn't move a mountain. She probably had never been to church in her life. She certainly had never read the Bible. What's so great about her faith?*

*The woman is from the region of Tyre and Sidon. These were Phoenician cities just beyond the northern border of Israel. The people worshiped Phoenician gods. They weren't Jewish. They were pagans. By stating that she is from the **region** suggests that she was a rural peasant, rather than a city-dweller.*

*She's a Canaanite. (Mark has Syrophenician.) Matthew's more Jewish audience may be more aware of the enmity between Jews and Canaanites that had existed since the time of Noah. Canaan was the son of Ham, who saw his father naked. Noah utters this curse in Gen 9:25-27:*

*Even more significant than this ancient curse about being slaves to the Jews, is the promise given to Abraham: "And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God" (Gen 17:8). They were part of the people the Israelites were commanded by God to annihilate (Dt 20:17), which Joshua carried out partially as the people of Israel took over their land and cities.*

*These historical events would not make Canaanites very friendly towards Jews nor towards the Jewish God. Why would this woman approach Jesus? One suggestion is that she had nowhere else to turn. Perhaps she had heard reports about the healing miracles of Jesus. Her need was so great. Her concern for her daughter so deep, that she dared cross that rift between Jews and Canaanites. She was at the point where she had nothing to lose, and perhaps everything to gain. She comes and cries out to*

*Jesus for help. A similar cry was made by Peter when he sank into the sea.*

*Douglas Hare (Matthew, Interpretation Commentaries) suggests the following application:*

*The story reminds us that members of despised or oppressed groups must be bold in seeking relief of their misery. The woman is not content to be ignored, because she is convinced that her daughter deserves to be given a chance at living a normal, productive life. Her persistence, based on her faith in a God who can change things for the better, is rewarded. [p. 179]*

*A contrast can be made between the earlier verses in the chapter where Pharisees, claiming to be righteous, have found ways **not** to honor their fathers and mothers and this pagan woman who is willing to risk everything for the sake of her daughter. Who seems to be fulfilling the "law and the prophets"?*

*Hare also offers the reminder, "We are, as Krister Stendahl has suggested, merely 'honorary Jews'" [p. 179]. Most of us cannot trace our ancestors back to the "house of Israel" (either "lost" or "pastured" sheep). This means we are in the "dog" category. In both Hebrew and Greek, the term "dog" is a name of contempt. Even in English, "bitch" is a proper term for a female dog, but when used of people or the addition of "sonofa," it becomes a highly derogatory term.....*

*Jesus has a calling. It is to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." He cannot change that calling for this pagan woman. When Jesus says, "It is not fair ...." (v. 26). The word for "fair" (kalos), can imply "morally right". It is a question of morals. It is not morally right to let children starve while dogs eat their fill. Implying that it is not morally right for the "King of the Jews" to help this Canaanite woman.*

*The lady agrees with Jesus. One way to disarm criticism is to agree with the critic. "You're a dog," implies Jesus. She agrees! "I am a dog, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table." Or, perhaps in other words, "I know I don't deserve a thing from you. I am no better than a dog, but even dogs receive better treatment than you're giving me. Can't you spare a few crumbs of grace?" We know from the miraculous feeding story from a few weeks ago that there is enough "bread" to feed thousands. She received her crumbs. Her daughter is healed.*

Brian Stoffregen

Faith Lutheran Church, 2215 S 8th Ave., Yuma, AZ 85364

e-mail: [brian.stoffregen@gmail.com](mailto:brian.stoffregen@gmail.com)

ACTIVE

Read the passage Matthew 15: 21-28 out loud. Now read the passage out loud using different voices—one for the woman, one for the disciples, one for Jesus and a voice for the narrator. Remember to read with feeling.

Now take a piece of paper and divide it into fourths. In each quadrant write a person in the Scripture—the woman, the disciples, Jesus, the narrator. Write the first word that comes to your mind about each one. (Remember the narrator is Matthew, the gospel writer). Example—the woman—persistent. Now go back to each quadrant and write a simple prayer based on the word that came to your mind. Example: woman—persistent-- Lord, help me not to give up.

VISUAL:



Read the passage: Matthew 15:21-28. As you look at this painting by Picasso,

- Why might this woman be crying?
- What feelings are depicted in this painting?
- Have you experienced God wiping away your tears?

Breath Prayer based on Matthew 15:21-28: Lord, help me.

May you feel the Spirit stirring in your life. Pastor Jan