

St Marc, Grenoble
Sunday 20th August 2022 (Trinity 11)
Romans 11: 1 - 2a, 29 - 32
Matthew 15: 21 - 28
'Scraps?'

Good morning Everyone, whether you are here in Church, or joining by Zoom, Welcome! Let's Pray.

This morning's Gospel needs to come with a Public Health warning; the first time I preached on it, I was accused of being politically incorrect. But the fact is, it is a rather difficult story to understand fully, and racial and religious cultural issues make it more complicated, but we'll try and get to grips with it.

First, as usual, I'll be really interested to hear what may have jumped out for you from these readings ... Thank you

To try and put things into some kind of life context, I'd like to share a true story with you: When my son, Olli, - who's now 47 - was about 18 months old, mealtimes were a bit of a battle. Usually, more food went on the floor than in his mouth. We never had to bother about cleaning the floor, because our lovely dog Meg - a Border Collie cross Corgi - was always happy to pick up all the scraps from around his high-chair.

Olli soon learned that if he didn't want to eat something, all he had to do was push it off his high-chair tray and the dog would happily eat it. The dog was very fond of him.

There was one memorable occasion when Olli decided he didn't want the dish of custard he'd just been given. As usual, he pushed the dish off the edge of his tray.

The dog was already waiting there – for any gift. As the bowl left the tray, she was right beneath the chair ... but, sadly, the dish - filled with custard, landed upside down – right on top of her head! You've never seen such a frustrated, and slightly dazed, dog – desperately trying to lick up the custard as it dripped off her head!

Now, let's get back to our passage – which may seem difficult to understand at first

After the feeding of the five thousand, and the walking on water miracle, which we explored last week, Jesus had a dispute with the Pharisees, because He was teaching about what should be considered clean, or unclean, especially in the way of food. This was like a red rag to a bull and, with all the hassle, Jesus and His disciples decided to take a break.

They left Israel and, we're told, they visited the district of Tyre and Sidon. Actually that province was probably about as far away as Vizille is from us, or just a bit longer. It seems it took about a day to walk, and Jesus and His disciples probably thought it was

a good place to keep a low profile and to get some relaxation! They probably wanted to keep out of sight from the Pharisees too.

It's important to understand that the people there were Gentiles, rather than Jews; and, before His death, Jesus always maintained that His mission was to 'God's chosen people', the Jewish people or the 'Children of Israel' as they are often referred to.

However, there was a woman there who knew about Jesus and recognised who He was. (I wonder how she knew?)

She wanted Jesus to heal her daughter who was 'demon possessed' (**How would we describe that today??**) In our terms, maybe she had epilepsy, or some other sort of fits; she may even have been suffering from something like schizophrenia. Anyway, this lady was positive that Jesus could heal her daughter; and she was determined to get His attention.

At first, Jesus totally ignored her - He did not even answer her. Why was that?

Well, for a start, she was definitely not a Jew, she was a Gentile, and Jews were not supposed to have anything at all to do with Gentiles (especially, Jewish men were supposed to have nothing to do with Gentile women) – it made them ceremonially unclean if they did.

So, when Jesus ignored her, she started pestering the disciples – she was not going to give up! Her daughter was very sick, and she was convinced Jesus could cure her; and no-one else could.

But the disciples came to Jesus and said "Please get rid of her, she won't leave us alone; and we're here for a break."

So Jesus said, "Push Off lady! – I'm here to reach out to Children of Israel – I don't heal Gentiles. It's not right to give the children's food to the dogs.

But, she wasn't going to be put off so easily, and replied: "No, but even dogs get to eat up the scraps that fall on the floor while the children are eating!"

"Wow!" said Jesus, "You've got real faith, haven't you! So, let it be as you've asked."

You see, Jesus took pity on her, and we're told the daughter was healed from that very moment; although Jesus never actually met the daughter at all. Even the 'scraps' from Jesus are life changing.

I wonder if anyone can remember another occasion when something similar happened? ...

It was in Matthew 8: 5 – 13, when a Roman Centurion, also a Gentile of course, asked Jesus to heal his servant who was paralysed. On that occasion, Jesus said 'I haven't

found faith like this , even in Israel' and again the servant was healed without Jesus even seeing him.

It wasn't that Jesus couldn't heal people who weren't Jewish. But, His mission before His crucifixion was clearly focussed on getting the Jews – God's chosen people – back on track for salvation. Giving them the chance to claim the redemption He was offering them.

But, of course, as we've seen, most of them refused that opportunity, and following His resurrection, Jesus told the disciples to 'Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all people!'

Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the king who invited guests to his son's wedding banquet? (In Matt 22: 1 - 14) When the banquet was prepared the guests had all sorts of excuses why they couldn't come - So the King sent his servants into the streets around the city and told them to invite everyone they could find. (A similar parable mentioned in Luke 14: 14 - 24) When the Judean people - the Children of Israel - wouldn't come back to God's eternal banquet; then the Heavenly Banquet was opened to everyone.

But, as we've seen in this story, even before that, Jesus' compassion simply couldn't help responding to such bold faith!

As we go out into our lives and our community, this week, we too should be challenged by such bold faith and be stimulated to be as determined in seeking Jesus' healing for the issues in our life.

We all have major issues we need to bring before Him for healing.

We should also be as clearly focussed as Jesus was on the mission that we have been given – which, in our case, is “to proclaim the Gospel - the Good News of Jesus to all people!” that is those here in Church, but also the people we meet in our day to day lives.

Let's pray

