

GREAT FAITH
(MATTHEW 15.21-28)

TODAY WE HAVE AN EXPRESSION COMMONLY USED TO PROMOTE CREATIVITY: "THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX." IN OTHER WORDS DON'T THINK THE SAME WAY OVER AND OVER AGAIN. SOMETIMES JESUS SURPRISED PEOPLE BY THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX. THE GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY PROVIDES A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THAT. ONCE WHEN JESUS WAS COMBATING THE PHARISEES AND TEACHING DISCIPLES IN PARABLES HE WITHDREW FROM THE CROWDS AND TOOK OFF FOR THE HINTERLANDS, THE AREA OF THE CITIES OF TYRE AND SIDON WHICH WERE AS PAGAN AS A TOTEM POLE. WHY ON EARTH DID JESUS DO THAT? WELL, HE WAS THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX, SO TO SPEAK. THE PEOPLE OF THAT REGION WERE NOT THE JEWS, NOT THE CHOSEN PEOPLE, TO WHOM HE MADE THIS SURPRISE VISIT.

BY THIS TIME IN HIS MINISTRY JESUS WAS QUITE WELL KNOWN, EVEN IN THE FOREIGN COUNTRIES AJOINING THE HOLY LAND. THE PEOPLE IN THOSE PLACES, WHO WERE CALLED CANAANITES, HAD HEARD THAT HE WAS A HEALER. ONE OF THEM, A MOTHER, WAS IN GREAT DISTRESS BECAUSE HER DAUGHTER WAS SEVERELY AFFECTED BY A DEMON. DEMONIC POSSESSION MAY STRIKE US AS ARCAINE, BUT FOR ALL WE KNOW SOME PSYCHIATRIC PROBLEMS TODAY MAY WELL BE DUE TO SUCH POSSESSION. CERTAINLY JESUS RECOGNIZED THE WOMAN'S DAUGHTER AS BEING POSSESSED.

SO FREQUENTLY WHEN JESUS WAS ASKED TO HEAL A PERSON, HE IMMEDIATELY DID SO. TAKE THE EXAMPLE OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT WHO WAS SICK UNTO DEATH. HIS MASTER BELIEVED IN JESUS AND PLEADED WITH HIM TO HEAL HIS SERVANT. JESUS MARVELED AT THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION AND HEALED

THE SERVANT IMMEDIATELY: **GO; LET IT BE DONE FOR YOU AS YOU HAVE BELIEVED** (MATTHEW 8.13). NOW THAT SOUNDS LIKE JESUS.

BUT LET'S LOOK AT JESUS OPERATING OUTSIDE THE BOX. THIS CANAANITE WOMAN SEES HIM WALKING DOWN THE STREET OF HER TOWN. SHE HAS BEEN HEARING THINGS ABOUT THIS MAN, AND SIMPLY BY HEARING SHE BELIEVES IN HIM AND HIS ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO HEAL HER DAUGHTER. KNOWING JESUS AS WE DO WE WOULD EXPECT THE LORD TO JUMP RIGHT IN AND HEAL THAT POOR POSSESSED GIRL. THE DISCIPLES TOO WANT HIM TO HEAL THE GIRL AND SEND HER BOTHERSOME MOTHER AWAY. BUT JESUS DOES NEITHER OF THOSE THINGS. HE IS THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX, AND HE HAS GOOD REASONS TO DO SO.

JESUS HAD IMMEDIATELY HEALED THE ROMAN CENTURION'S SERVANT, SO WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO HEAL THE

CANAANITE'S DAUGHTER. "GO FOR IT, JESUS, WE SAY." BUT JESUS' WILL IS HIS OWN. "NOT MY WILL BE DONE, LORD, BUT YOURS." HE SAYS TO HER, **I WAS SENT ONLY TO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL** ON THE FACE OF IT THOSE WORDS SOULD LIKE AN INSULT. INDEED, AND IT WILL GET WORSE. SORRY, LADY, BUT YOU GOT THE WRONG NATIONALITY. YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE CANAANITES DESPISED BY THE JEWS.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT A PERSON REALLY HAS FAITH IN JESUS AND IS NOT JUST PRETENDING. THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: THE BELIEVING PERSON NEVER GIVES UP ON JESUS. WHAT DOES SHE DO WHEN JESUS' ANSWER SEEMS AN INSULT TO HER? INSTEAD OF BACKING AWAY SHE CAME CLOSER TO HIM, KNELT DOWN AND SAID, DESPITE ALL THE ANXIETY SHE WAS FEELING, **LORD, HELP ME.** "I KNOW I AM NOT OF YOUR FLOCK OF

SHEEP, BUT HELP ME ANYWAY. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."

I IMAGINE THE EMOTIONAL TENSION OF THAT MOMENT WAS OVERWHELMING FOR BOTH THE LADY AND JESUS. SHE DID NOT GIVE UP ON JESUS; NEITHER DID HE GIVE UP ON HER. HE AND HIS DISCIPLES DID NOT WALK AWAY. HE NUDGED HER, HE PUSHED HER, HE ROCKED HER TO HER VERY SOUL: **IT IS NOT RIGHT TO TAKE THE CHILDREN'S BREAD AND THROW IT TO THE DOGS.** IN THOSE DAYS DOGS HAD THE STATUS OF A SCOUNDREL ["LOOK OUT FOR THE DOGS, LOOK OUT FOR THE EVILDOERS . . ." (PHILIPPIANS 3.2)]. IF THIS CANAANITE WOMAN HAD NOT BELIEVED IN JESUS, SHE WOULD HAVE SPAT AND WALKED AWAY. INSTEAD SHE SAID THE MOST ASTOUNDING THING: **YES, LORD, YET EVEN THE DOGS EAT THE CRUMBS THAT FALL FROM THEIR MASTER'S TABLE.** "SHE WAS NOT ASHAMED, TO HER OWN BENEFIT, OF THE NAME OF

DOGS" (EPHRAIM) JESUS, OF COURSE, ALREADY KNOW OF HER GREAT FAITH, BUT HE WANTED TO HEAR IT EXPRESSED; HE WANTED HER TO BEG OF HIM. HE WANTED THE SAME PRAYER OF HER AS HE WANTS OF OURSELVES IN OUR OWN FAITH. AS LUTHER SAYS SO WELL, "WE ARE BEGGARS ALL." "JESUS' REBUFF DEEPENS HER FAITH" (HARSTAD). "SHE CONFESSES HER UNWORTHINESS AND ALSO HER DESIRE TO RECEIVE HIS PEACE" (HARSTAD). THE LADY BEGGED AND SHE WAS NOT ASHAMED. A GREAT FAITH IS A BEGGAR'S FAITH. HE SAID TO HER: **O WOMAN, GREAT IS YOUR FAITH! BE IT DONE FOR YOU AS YOU DESIRE. AND HER DAUGHTER WAS HEALED INSTANTLY.** THIS IS THE ACCOUNT OF JESUS THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX.

"THIS PERSISTENT CANAANITE WOMAN GAINS JESUS' PRAISE FOR BELIEVING THAT HE WILL HELP HER SICK DAUGHTER. IN TIME OF NEED. WE OFTEN EITHER FAIL TO PRAY WITH 3

SUCH DETERMINATION OR ONLY ASK
HESITANTLY. NO GOOD. INSTEAD WE
OUGHT TO **PRAY WITHOUT CEASING**, AS
WE HEAR FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL IN I
THESSALONIANS 5.17). JESUS HEARS
ALL PRAYERS OFFERED IN HIS NAME,
AND HE WILL ANSWER IN HIS OWN TIME
AND WAY AS IS BEST FOR US.
THEREFORE, WE CAN PRAY WITH
CONFIDENCE" (NOTE IN THE LSB). AND
OUR EXAMPLE IS A PAGAN, FOREIGN
WOMAN WHO BELIEVED IN JESUS AS
LORD. AMEN.