

January 28th

‘For saying that you may go.- the demon has left your daughter’

Life-changing words for the daughter as well as the mother. Over the coming weeks, we are reflecting upon people Jesus met and the impact Jesus had upon them. Here, we are witnessing Jesus’ gentile ministry in Tyre which then continues in Decapolis and although Jesus has gone to Tyre to be alone, it seems that he cannot remain anonymous - the crowds pursue him wherever he goes - eager for healing and teaching.

In this account, it is only one mother and one daughter who are helped as others look on, witnessing what seems to be a change of mind by Jesus.

We can only surmise that as Jesus heard the woman speak and as he looked at her face, he saw a fierce, burning love for a sick daughter. We witness him changing and offering God’s healing grace because of a compassion which burned within him.

Today I would like to invite you, in the tradition of St Ignatius, and with some poetic licence, to enter into this story in Mark using your imagination to see the event through the eyes of the unnamed Syrophenecian woman, in the hope that we might better understand the faith that she showed and the love that she received from Jesus.

My Story

As my daughter grew up, she began to have fits. I never knew when they might come and I was never quite sure if she would be alive at the end of each one. At any time of day or night, she would collapse, froth at the mouth, her eyes would roll back almost inside her head and every part of her body would be flung around flaying this way and that. I would hold her gently but firmly talking softly to her telling her she would be all right. Afterwards she would be exhausted and unwell for a few days. I coped as best I could but it was the not knowing – it could happen at any time of day or night. The doctors were costly and when I finally saw one I was told he couldn’t help – he said she might grow out of it – but she didn’t. The fits began to be more frequent - sometimes every other day. I was always living on tenterhooks - waiting for the knock on the door – someone saying, ‘Come quickly she’s on the floor over

there' or ' It's happened again'. Others, not surprisingly, were wary - I could see it in their eyes. Scared of my beautiful daughter – because she **is** beautiful – there's no doubt about that – I could see the look in men's eyes as she went to draw water from the well. I knew that her illness made her even more vulnerable.

Then I heard of the man Jesus, a man of God – I heard he had healed lepers and even brought some people back to life. I was a Syrophenecian and he was a Jew. The Jews despised us - but Jesus apparently had healed all kinds of people – even a Roman soldier's daughter. I felt deep inside that this man came from God and was the only one who could help her. If only I could talk to him him. Then to my delight, I heard one day that Jesus was in the neighbourhood. I told my neighbour that my daughter would be alone and set off to find him, my heart pounding with anticipation - if only I could find him – if only she could have the chance that other people had in life. He was some distance from where we lived but I ran as fast as I could – walking every so often to catch my breath. After what seemed an eternity – I found him. He was in Tyre. I found him but I didn't exactly see him – I saw him slip quietly into a house in a side street when the crowds weren't looking.

I ran into the house and fell on my knees:' Please will you heal my daughter – she suffers from a demon, and I know that you can help'

Such a short sentence to describe the way her life and mine had been in turmoil and distress all these years. There was a pause as he looked at me - my heart sank – he's not going to help after all – my daughter will continue to have fits until one kills her – because I am a Syro Phoeneciam and not a Jew – because my people had worshipped gods, not the one God. He's only going to help those from the House of Israel. To my horror, I heard him say, 'It is not fair to take the childrens' food and throw it to the dogs'. That's all – I was no better than a 'dog': compared with those who were chosen by God – those in the house of Israel, I was like the lowest of all animals. My birth was against me and yet – why shouldn't my daughter be able to benefit from this man of God. I heard my voice saying with surprising confidence, 'Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' There was a silence - I saw his friends look horrified and one gasped at my audacity as an outsider and as a woman. Jesus looked at me - sweaty, dirty, hair over my forehead,

eyes full of desperation. His eyes seemed to soften, then to my amazement he said, 'For saying that, you may go. The demon has left your daughter. ' I knew from his words and his look that at that very moment, my daughter was well. I leapt up, aware of people looking at me strangely but not caring and I ran as fast as I could all the way home where I saw her waiting at the door to greet me. She looked calm and at peace. Trembling and exhausted I hugged her and thanked God again and again.

Jesus's greater love overcame his own prejudice of thinking that he might be on earth only for those in the House of Israel.

We can walk away from this story simply thinking 'well that's good of Jesus to help her' – or we can allow the words to enter the depths of our intellect and emotions. We can respond by learning how we might better behave. We can allow ourselves to be challenged about our own narrow mindedness – our attitude to those who dress differently, to those who speak differently, to those who come from another culture and so on. If we want to follow this example of Jesus meeting one desperate mother, then we must be ready to allow our God given love and our God given compassion for other people to overcome any prejudices or assumptions that we might make. We might need to be ready to change and to be surprised.

I leave you with some questions: Are you shocked by Jesus' response? Are you surprised? How would you have treated the strange and foreign woman? What difference does this account in Mark make to you today, tomorrow and next week?