

Who Let the Dogs Out?

Matthew 15:21-28

Sunday, August 16, 2020

Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. A CEO of a large company talked about the stresses of his job.
 - 1. He said: "People always want something from me."
 - 2. "But I have found that being the boss isn't difficult—once you learn that your main job is to be the one who says 'No.'"
- B. Now, I don't know if his approach to management is correct or not, but I suspect that some of us can understand how he feels.
 - 1. You might be a manager or crew chief or administrator?
 - 2. Or you might have the even more challenging job of being the CEO and CFO of a family with lots of children in it?
 - 3. Most of us know what it is like to tell somebody "No."
- C. It even happens for pastors and preachers.
 - 1. A friend sent an article from another church's newsletter.
 - 2. The pastor wrote: "Dear Friends: Feeling deeply the loss of the social element of public worship, you will, I am sure, yield graciously to the closing order for the largest measure of good."
 - 3. "It is heartening to know that the God we worship in the sanctuary is not limited by time or place and that the Bible we read in the meeting house is not chained to the pulpit."
 - 4. "The fellowship of kindred minds is not dependent on personal contact but on blending of spiritual thought."
 - 5. "So, may I suggest that the Lord's Day be a holy day and not a holiday; that it be a time of rekindling the fires of family altars; when once again each household becomes a parish."
 - 6. "In your prayers some things will have preeminence—God will be petitioned for a cessation to this epidemic."
 - 7. "And the large place that the Church is occupying in the present world order will continue to be a cause for thanksgiving!"
 - 8. That was written by the pastor of Stanford Christian Church in Kentucky...in 1918...in response to the Spanish Flu pandemic!

II. JESUS KNEW ABOUT THESE STRESSES TOO.

- A. This story from Matthew 15 will become more powerful for us if we remember the timing and context.
 - 1. Jesus has been trying to get a break.
 - a. He goes off to pray and get away from the crowds.
 - b. He even packs up his pals in a boat and sends them out to sea.
 - c. But after a rather stormy conclusion, Jesus is back to work.
 - d. So, he tries to get away again by leaving the country.
 - 2. But this pesky, persistent, parent shows up!
 - a. She is described as a Canaanite woman, which is an anachronistic adjective because it is an old, archaic term.
 - b. But the phrase is used to heighten the tension in the tale.

- c. There is a long history of fightin' and feudin' between the Israelites and Canaanites—so she is an “extreme” foreigner.
- 3. And yet, she is also a mother who is desperate.
 - a. Her daughter is possessed by a demon—she needs help.
 - b. She has heard about Jesus, so she seeks him out, fights her way through the disciples' zone defense, and gets an interview.
- 4. And how does our sweet shepherd Jesus react?
 - a. First, he is silent—then he calls her a dog.
 - b. Is he just having a bad day or is he really burned out?
 - c. Or is she way, way outside of his “circle?”
- 5. His responses do not deter her—she stands toe-to-toe with the Son of God and finally delivers her knockout punchline.
 - a. “Yes, but even dogs eat crumbs from the master's table.”
 - b. And Jesus changes his mind.
- B. Perhaps this is a pivotal moment, a time when he realizes that he has been sent not just to a certain group—but to everybody?
 - 1. Bam—she breaks through Jesus' prejudice and perplexity!
 - 2. Maybe this is one of those life-changing encounters where Jesus gains a new perspective on his ministry and mission?
 - 3. She is an outsider who becomes an insider who “knows” Jesus.
 - 4. The supposed insiders—the religious leaders and even the disciples—have trouble understanding who Jesus is.
 - 5. Jesus' “Whoa, woman!” gets transformed to “Wow, woman!”

III. **THIS CENTURIES-OLD STORY STILL SPEAKS TO US.**

- A. We still wrestle with insider/outsider issues in so many ways.
- B. Some of you will be heading back to school—or are there already.
 - 1. What a painful experience it is to be “left out.”
 - 2. To be measured by small-mean-minded people is just wrong.
 - 3. Our prayers are with you as you deal with the stresses—and as far as God is concerned, you will always be an insider!
- C. Some of you deal with these kinds of issues at work.
 - 1. Have you ever started working at a new job and found it difficult to break into established circles of friendship?
 - 2. Have you ever been alienated by your co-workers?
- D. A Dilbert cartoon captures it well.
 - 1. His boss says: “It's time for peer-performance reviews.”
 - 2. “There's a limited budget for raises. Your best strategy is to slander your co-workers so there's more money for you.”
 - 3. Maybe that hits too close to home for some of you?
 - 4. But as far as God is concerned, you'll always be an insider.
- E. Insider/outsider issues happen in churches—surprise!
 - 1. We are all supposed to be insiders...but we fall short at times.
 - 2. How does it feel to try to break into a class or group or choir when everybody else seems to know each other...
 - 3. And nobody notices you are there or invites you to come back?
 - 4. Or what if someone like this pesky Canaanite woman, someone very different from us, wants to join our group or church?

5. From what I have seen in church life, “insiders” are not always thrilled when Jesus reaches out and welcomes the outsiders.
- F. And we are well-aware that insider/outsider tensions exist around the world and seem to be on the rise in our own country.
1. The gap between the haves and have-nots grows—the 1%-ers are thrilled with the market—the unemployed can’t pay the rent and wonder about their next meal.
 2. For some it is red and blue—athletically and politically.
 3. For others it is the true Americans and “all those foreigners.”
 4. Some see our country as the “new Israel”—God’s chosen ones.
 5. Painful reminders of this mindset continue to happen.
 6. There are growing number of hate groups in America.
 - a. One group leader said: “The division we would like to see is all heterosexual white men and woman on one side and all Jews, homosexuals, blacks, Asians and Latinos on the other.”
 - b. “Then we would be ready for the shooting to start—and we would settle the matter pretty quickly.”
 7. Can you imagine having that mindset?
 8. I saw a picture of a baby who wore not a bonnet, but the white hood of the Ku Klux Klan—what will that child be taught?
 9. It is heartbreaking...but it is not going away.
- G. So, as people of faith we have to rise up and respond.
1. We have to stand with the Canaanite woman for what is right and just.
 2. We have to engage in boundary-breaking conversations.

IV. **GOD CALLS US TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.**

- A. I have been pleased to hear that many of you are having helpful discussions about what it means to be a “purple church.”
- B. I appreciated an article about reducing polarization.
1. The author said: “Useful tension drives democracy, but too much partisanship makes democracies fall apart.”
 2. The author suggests seven ways to heal polarization.
 - a. First, call out your own group—if people stand against hateful language and actions it can change partisans’ perceptions.
 - b. Avoid bad jokes—they can have a strong effect on normalizing prejudice and removing violent inhibitions.
 - c. Make social media kinder—regular people can remind users that online speech has real-world, off-line consequences.
 - d. Downplay the fringes and highlight the median—we actually agree on policies far more than people realize.
 - e. Emphasize disagreement within parties—most issues are much more complex than simple left/right perspectives.
 - f. Help others imagine empathy—stories that encourage us to see other perspectives can reduce our prejudices.
 - g. Finally, avoid repeating misinformation—repetition leads our brains to think things are true—regardless of the accuracy.
 3. We are in this together—we have to find ways to work together.
 3. The fact is, but for the grace of God, we were all outsiders.
 1. Bigotry and intolerance are not genetic—they are learned.

2. So, we have to rise up and respond with hope and love and faith.
 - a. We were all outsiders—and if we are within the embrace of God’s love, it is not because of who we are or what we have.
 - b. It is not because of who we know or what we own.
 - c. It is not because of how hard we’ve worked or smart we are.
 - d. We are insiders because we have received a gift from God!
 - e. We have some mighty Good News to share!
3. And because we have received the gift, we are challenged and called to be about the business of making outsiders insiders.
4. Jesus’ prayer that we may all be one remains unfulfilled.
5. Our goal is to keep the vision alive and to bring to it all of the faith, resourcefulness, and persistence that God can give us.
6. Let us rejoice that we are all God’s children!
7. Let us give thanks that we are all invited...to gather ‘round the Welcome Table!