

From Our Conference Minister



No One is Left Out! (Matthew 15:21-28)

Disparity in healthcare access and coverage has been a problem for a long time, dating back to Jesus' time. In Matthew 15, Jesus seems to weigh in on the healthcare debate. We are given some insight into healthcare related issues and how Jesus' handled them.

Jesus was in search of a respite away from the crowds. On his first stop, Jesus visited with some Jewish friends at their home where a (non-Jewish), Canaanite woman somehow obtained an audience with him. She humbly begged Jesus to heal her daughter, who likely suffered from a mental illness.

The Canaanite woman had a desperate need. The need drove her to risk humiliation to go against the established norms and conventions of that time. She crossed religious boundaries, those that forbid a Gentile woman from talking to a Jewish teacher. She crossed social boundaries, those that forbid a woman from being present at meals with men. She dared to cross every boundary that stood in her way to get to Jesus. Jesus was her last chance of getting the healthcare her daughter needed. The woman was afraid that without healthcare, her child would die.

Jesus after ignoring her at first, finally responded to her passionate cry for help by saying, "...I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." (v. 24, 26) We may find Jesus' use of the word "dogs" to describe the woman and her daughter offensive to our modern sensibilities and in conflict with our perceptions of him. F. Gerald Downing explains that "... first-century Jews (the "children" in this passage) referred to the pagans as dogs because of their failure to observe ritual purity laws."

Yet the woman persisted. She was willing to enter uncomfortable conversations. She would not be discouraged or deterred by insults from others. Deep down we can relate to her in some ways, no matter how different she may seem to us.

She remained undeterred and had enough hope in the incredible generosity of God. She believed that even the crumbs from the table were more than enough for all of God's children. No one needed to be left out. She responded to Jesus saying, "*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.*" (v.27) Jesus responded to her persistence saying, "*Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.*" (v.28) Jesus healed her daughter.

This story is a sad reminder that some followers of Jesus have always been less accepting of women and people from different nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual orientations and economic classes. It is a reminder to examine our attitude as "good Christians" when we make judgments about issues in our public life such as immigration, health care or racism.

Do we still label "outsiders" as deserving of crumbs or less from God's table of plenty?

Religious, social and other entrenched customs and prejudices should not stand in the way of welcoming all people into God's realm. This message is as relevant now as it was back then; no one needs to be left out. To advocate equality for all and to condemn the racist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia last weekend, the UCC leadership recently issued this **pastoral letter**.

For God so loved the world, the whole world...*no one is left out!* This is still the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Amen.

In Christ,

Monica

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