

EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY

14 Pentecost A

“Let is be done for you as you wish” Matthew 15:28

A dog ‘info’ website says: “The number one biggest mistake dog owners can make with their dogs is to treat them like humans. The human race is such a kind, compassionate species. We tend to look at our canine companions as little humans, when in reality, they are animals. In a dog’s world, there must be an order, a leader on down to the last follower. Everyone has a place. The leaders are the strength of the pack. The followers need the leader to guide them. This primal instinct keeps the pack secure and happy.” From: <http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/articles/humandog.htm>.

Talk of dogs in a human world must have been normal for that day as it is in ours. Dogs look to their pack leader called the alpha. And every dog knows its place. Despite the differences between breeds dogs are amazing examples of obedience, kindness and affection toward one another and are willing to risk their lives for those they love. Many people were treated like dogs or worse throughout history. The irony is that dogs, even the ones we saw starving in Mexico this year, continue to be faithful.

Cries for mercy go unheard today in both the dog and human world. Excuse my metaphor: every dog has its day. And there was a Canaanite woman who felt she was in a dog’s world until she met up with Jesus. Jesus response or lack of it seems a bit harsh coming from a rabbi. He certainly heard her cry for help but in the moment refused to stop and listen.

That happened to us last Sunday at the 9:30 AM service when a homeless man came to our church door looking for financial help. He knew me and I had answered his call for help during the week on two other occasions. I looked at my watch and it was exactly starting time. I told the usher that I could not help Mike now. I had a mission to be the leader of worship at that time and Mike could wait. I later found out that the usher gave him what he wanted. Yet, what Mike needed was more than a handout.

In hindsight, what if I had stopped the worship service and said that we were *going to offer Mike's life on this altar* instead of bread and wine in order to devise a plan that could radically change his life? What would you have done? The disciples in the gospel story tried to get rid of that pagan woman.

Was the Holy Spirit obeyed last Sunday? We believe that Jesus comes in the form of bread and wine each Sunday. He bids all of us to come to His table. Could Jesus have come in a different way other than bread and wine to test our tradition? In the form of a homeless man? God truly has expectations of us – but we decide whether we can rise up with His help to meet them.

The Canaanite woman, a Gentile, was outside Jesus' traditional messianic mission. Jesus came to teach the children of Israel. The needs of Gentiles would come later in the ministry of the church. If the Jews were first, then the food for “the children” of Israel was not to be thrown to the dogs. The woman appeared not to be on Jesus list of priorities.

However, the Canaanite woman's tenacity of spirit and undaunted faith reveals something more important than a traditional view of his mission. The woman acknowledged Jesus as Lord. Her answer to Jesus showed her faith and her value as a person was not based on her gender or where she was born.

The lesson that tradition must be subject to what is right, that what is "unclean" on the outside is not damaging to the inner person, is played out in the Canaanite woman's search for help. For Jesus, though called for Israel's sake, to refuse to help this woman in the face of her faithfulness would be wrong. Jesus enlarged his mission to include the Gentiles. Jesus taught the inclusivity of the gospel message. I don't know that I am strong enough to break with tradition the next time a homeless person like Mike comes to our doors. God help my unbelief and let me see your Holy Spirit at work!

It was an obvious right to extend the grace of God's healing power to this woman and her daughter. The rigid legalism of the Pharisees made them so concerned with what was ritually clean and unclean that they could not smell the stench of their own hypocrisy. In

their zeal to do everything "right," they did much that was wrong. To deny the woman help, Jesus would have acted the same as a Pharisee.

How can we remain true to our tradition yet be open to the needs of those who enter our place of worship? What is the lesson of Jesus' moment of grace? The application of this change of tradition could be made to many people and it has to those who worship here. One small example I can think of is the introduction of praise music to our worship. That type of music is relatively new to the Episcopal Church. Yet when we first discussed it there was resistance. The argument was largely tradition and a prior failed attempt as I recall. Since that first discussion it took 2 years for us to find the musicians and the acceptance that this kind of worship is meaningful for many. There you have it! You the faithful proved that change can be for the good and we have NOT lost our Episcopal culture.

How does this compare to what we could have done to turn the life of a DOG into the life of a HUMAN! When God brought Mike to our door He brought us a gift and that gift preaches our sermon this day. May God forgive our cries for mercy when we fail to stop, listen and feel the heartbeat of His Son Jesus Christ!

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life. Amen.