

5 September 2021 Mark 7:24-30

When you're thinking about taking a break ...

Home or away?

Jesus had been working flat out. Wherever he went, more and more people came, wanting, wanting, wanting. Wanting to hear what he had to say, those exciting, dangerous, revolutionary ideas, wanting help, wanting healing for themselves or their families. They crowded round him, they pursued him even when he took a boat to get away, they needed feeding, physically and spiritually.

Now he's seeking a bit of respite, hoping to rest, unrecognised, in this foreign land. He's chosen 'away'!

But word gets out. And one desperate mum has got to go and ask for help. She's not Jewish. She's got a child who is possessed. She's disqualified in so many ways.

She's tried everything. Local doctors, alternative medicine, herbal remedies, local gods. Is she grasping at straws now? Or does she have that secret stirring in her guts that **this is it?** She rushes in and flings herself at his feet, maybe she's sobbing. Imploring, begging, entreating him to listen, to help!

Finally, he focuses on her. And asks her a question.

And another question here for you:

Dogs or cats?

Dogs in biblical times were not always cuddly little pets: in Matthew 7: 6, we get a very clear idea about what dogs are like.

**6** "Who would hang earrings on a dog's ear or throw pearls in front of wild pigs? They'll only trample them under their feet and then turn around and tear you to pieces!

And what about the horrid end of Jezebel?

10As for Jezebel, **dogs** will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her."

Is Jesus accusing her of being as wretched as a feral dog? Is he rejecting her as any respectable Jew would at the time? But no, the word he uses for dogs refers to puppies or pet dogs, friendly little pet pooches. So what is he saying here? The children he refers to are his own nation, the nation of Israel.

He is reminding this poor, desperate Mummy that she is not part of the nation of Israel.

Stop and think! Who else is in the house, watching and listening? The householder, maybe some curious neighbours, and the team.

Is this a holiday for Jesus ... or an away day with his team? A chance to make super clear to them that the Good News is for EVERYONE. Jesus is here for everyone. Now and forever.

One more thing. How many ways can we say verse 27 "First let my children be fed and satisfied, for it isn't fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Angry? Impatient? Exhausted? or gentle and affectionate? The response is smart, direct, assertive even.

**28** ... "How true that is, Lord. But even puppies under the family table are allowed to eat the little children's crumbs."

She asks him for the gift of health for her little one not because she feels she deserves it but knowing that she doesn't deserve it. That's faith and that's grace. Jesus knows what is gnawing her heart with worry, he knows that he can make that child well with just a thought. And he knows that she is tough. She is not a bruised reed, who can't take any more, (I think of the woman with a haemorrhage, who was healed by touching his clothing. She was a bruised reed.) Isaiah 42:3

**3** a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

Jesus must be smiling as he tells her that she's absolutely right and sends her home. Her heart is so full she just has to run home as fast as her legs can carry her. And what overwhelming gratitude and joy when she gets there, to find her little one calm and well. Alleluia.

We share that huge relief when something we so feared has gone away or an illness was threatening and is cured or avoided? Alleluia again. A story not just of physical healing but of spiritual healing and wholeness. This lady wants Jesus' good news, and that's a message for all of us.

Do you think that Jesus knows us as well as he knew that lady? Does he understand our fears and worries? Does he know how we are feeling this minute? Will he consider if we can take a challenge or need a bit of tlc? Let's see. Matthew 11:28-30

**28** Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

**30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Yes! He just asks us to trust him as much as she did! Ha! Not as easy as it sounds! Let's open up to that longing for God's constant loving help. Let's invite him into every aspect of our lives.

And what do the team on their awayday think? Their great and humble leader yet again overcomes his all too human exhaustion to extend his compassion to the foreign, the anxious and miserable.

A strong reminder to us: we have to challenge worldly culture with our spiritual hearts.

How easy it is to make decisions about other people. Psychologists Willis and Todorov, at Princeton have shown that all it takes is a tenth of a second to form an impression of a stranger from their face.

‘Judgments made after the briefest exposure (1/10 of a second) were highly correlated with judgments made without time constraints.’

We leap to conclusions about other people. Jesus shows us yet again that we must remain open, ignore first impressions, treat everyone with respect and kindness. Nationality, social standing, level of need, none of this matters. We must be as loving as he is. Paul says, Romans 15:12

**12** And Isaiah prophesied:

“An heir to David’s throne will emerge,  
and he will rise up as ruler  
over all the non-Jewish nations,  
for all their hopes will be met in him.”

Let’s focus on Jesus’ rescue mission for all mankind and take our place in that mission!

**Fleur Pelly**