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There is one thing that I think most of us have experienced at some time in our life and that one thing is rejection. Whether it was being rejected from a team, a specific college, or a job or a promotion, we all think the world is coming to an end and we'll never be able to get beyond the rejection. Many famous people also experienced rejection. Did you know Elvis was kicked out of the Grand Ole Opry in 1954 and was told to stick to his day job of driving trucks. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* was rejected by 38 publishers before it finally got published. Lucille Ball got sent home from acting school in New York because the teachers thought she was too shy and would never make it as an actress.

As I said, I believe that most people can relate to experiencing some kind of rejection or another. Bottom line when we are either rejected or do the rejection we are drawing lines and saying who is included and who isn't and, sometimes, we even lay down the ground rules as who gets accepted and who doesn't and when they do or they don't.

The Gospel is very much about that kind of thing. It's about rejection and recognition, inclusion and exclusion, about not being accepted and being accepted. It's about the drawing of lines around people and groups of people, lines that can be called barriers.

In this Gospel, for instance, the woman who pushes those barriers is a Syro-Phoenician - a Gentile. Israel had conflicts with the Gentiles right from the time that they entered into the promised land, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. They had fought with them, suffered at each other's hands and even killed one another. The Israelites were always being warned of the heathenism of the Gentiles and believed these people had no experience of covenant. They did not have the Torah so they were excluded from anything considered Godly. Bottom line they were unacceptable and these lines had been drawn for years.

Yet this Gentile woman comes to Jesus to have her daughter healed. Despite the barriers that have been drawn that exclude her, first for being a woman, and secondly a person considered unclean by religious standards, she pushes her way towards Jesus. She was definitely crossing the lines. Her desperation, her hunger to get her daughter healed propelled her to push past all the barriers standing in her way.

Now what happens next doesn't compute with who we know Jesus to be - the compassionate one who is always crossing lines to show us God's compassion. But that's not what happens here. Sometimes we forget that Jesus was also fully human and we struggle with what that means. We forget that he could snap, get angry, and struggle with what it meant to be God's son. In this story we find that Jesus can also show us what it means to be confronted with his own prejudices that needed to be changed. He also shows us that this is how we grow as a child of God so we can embody a truer, and fuller comprehension of God's love.

We have to keep this in mind when we look at the exchange between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman. When Jesus tells her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," he is telling her that the children are the Jewish people and the dogs are the Gentiles. So, Jesus was not only insulting her but also rejecting her. Again, this is tough for us to hear because it is the

antithesis of the Jesus we have come to know. However, his rejection did not stop the woman. She challenged Jesus. She is the one whose hunger for her child merges with God's hunger for all of God's children to be included.

In this story, who Jesus thinks he is seems to matter less than who she thinks he is. She believes Jesus to be a healer, a person who comports with all sorts of people. So, in her impertinence, she invites Jesus to become Jesus again, the one who crosses all kinds of lines - lines of tradition and culture, power, gender, and race - to bring good, satisfying news to not only Jews but to everyone.

She seeks out his own humanity when she talks about the dogs under the table getting the crumbs from the children meaning they too are worthy to be fed. He is exposed to a contradiction between his own compassionate self, and the prejudicial attitude he has grown up with. She basically hits him over the head with the reality that even though they don't have the Torah they still have needs too. They have their sick, their worries and all those things that trouble them in the middle of the night. They also have their spiritual hunger for God.

It's an impressive response that stops Jesus in his tracks. All of sudden his perspective is changed. He is confronted with his own prejudices and realizes this is not God's will to exclude her or the rest of the Gentiles so he is opened up to a broader perspective. Jesus now sees the whole world in need of God's love not just Israel. The Syrophenician woman's faith and persistence teach him that God's purpose for him "is bigger than he had imagined, that there is enough of him to go around. In meeting this Gentile woman Jesus changed the way he looked upon his ministry and he was able to reach out and heal her daughter.

In the end, Jesus comes to a new understanding of who he is and what he has been called to do. The story celebrates the reality that inclusivity should go far beyond the norms of society. Faced with human need, Jesus knows that it is people who matter the most. No one can be treated like a dog and everyone must be fed. This story also calls us to examine our prejudices. Who do we treat like dogs? Who do we exclude? And how?

The Christian Church purports to be an inclusive and non-judgmental institution. We claim to seek the face of Christ in one another. We claim to follow Jesus' example. Yet we continually judge by outward appearances based on ideas, looks, gender and a host of other things. Our prejudices and biases show in who we include and who we exclude

That really is human nature. We are like that. The question is how do we overcome our human nature? How do we become Christ like in our dealings with people? In our baptismal covenant we are asked the question Will we respect the dignity of every human being? It doesn't say some people it says every human being and our response is we will. So how do we do that?

We can start by turning our attention to the Syro Phoenician woman. Someone once suggested that every church should have a statue, painting, or icon of the Syro Phoenician woman. Her image should be at the entrance where no one who enters a church could ever miss being reminded of those outside the church who cry for mercy and help. And it would also remind those coming into the church that all are welcome no matter who they are. And no one could leave the church without her prompting that the

world beyond the church door cries in pain This is what she challenged Jesus to do in regards to his mission and Jesus opened his arms to everyone.

The gospel calls us to open our arms to everyone and continues to call us to be doers of the word, not simply hearers. This means we are called to action. Maybe we need to let this passage inspire us to raise our sights; give us a new perspective on our lives, to see the world differently and to see us all as belonging to one another.

Jesus is our example in this: after his confrontation with the woman in today's gospel, he learned to broaden his love to include everyone and moved on to the next person in need of his healing touch.

Each of us needs to look around ourselves; Who is hungry? Who is lost? Who needs a helping hand? What are we called to be and do? How do we show those outside these doors that living a gospel life filled with compassion, love, encouragement, and inclusion is a God filled life?

We all have been given gifts that we are capable of sharing, no matter who we are. All we have to do is decide that we, ourselves, are the living gospel; and move, with God's help, into the reality that the Kingdom of God is where no one is excluded. Amen.