

Jesus does not want to be disturbed. He is trying – unsuccessfully – to escape notice. He should know better. His activity in the countryside has caught everyone’s attention. Everyone.

His particular approach to his own religion has all the Jews talking. His openness and willingness to ‘cross-cultural barriers’ means those outside ‘the faith’ are intrigued. This gentile woman is more than that; she’s convinced that Jesus can help her ailing daughter.

This happens when we’re at the end of our tether – when all the usual remedies have failed and we’re willing to try anything.

She tracks Jesus to his quiet place – a house meant for his respite from the demanding crowds. She doesn’t bother with any social preliminaries. She muscled her way to Jesus’ feet – she bows; she pleads for her daughter to be relieved to the demon that possesses her.

Now – let’s keep an open mind about the problem. This child is in need of help. Try not to replay those scenes from ‘The Exorcist’ when you hear this passage. Maybe it was like that and maybe it wasn’t. According to the best understanding of human health in that moment, the child has an inexplicable – and seemingly incurable condition. In a world ruled by a wide variety of medical, spiritual, and ritual approaches to human health, the possibilities for this young woman’s condition are endless. The important thing is that her mother believed that Jesus could help.

We are learning about how closely linked our physical, emotional and spiritual health are. After generations of treating these as completely separate, there is more and more understanding of how we really are an intricately woven fabric of body, mind and spirit. I say learning – in ancient societies, these close connections were assumed. So, the first and last hope for healing was the priest – the shaman – the local oracle-healer. Jesus seemed to be that to the crowds who followed after him – who forced him into these occasional sheltered retreats.

But Jesus does not respond to this particular request as expected. Jesus says “Let the children be fed first.” Are you familiar with that one? It’s still pretty popular – occasionally among Jesus’ people (who claim to be following the master’s lead.) It

often sounds like; ‘Our seniors/our veterans/our citizens need that funding/those jobs/to be first in line – refugees/first nations/strangers need to wait.’

Similar arguments are used around issues like poverty, addiction and homelessness: ‘There are plenty of opportunities – handouts are no solution – they need to work harder / spend less / control their urges...’

Or my personal favourite: This is a land of opportunity. They need to work for (insert benefit here) JUST LIKE I DID.”

Jesus uses this tired excuse – who knows why – and some would stop there and claim to be following his example. But there’s more to the story.

This woman didn’t come this far to be slandered. This woman is a warrior in the way that all women are warriors where their children are concerned. She knows what justice is like, and she knows that, no matter who is making the excuses, this Creation we all inhabit is abundant. There is enough for everyone – enough mercy; enough grace; enough wholeness; enough justice. She also knows that sometimes those on the lower rungs of the social order have to educate those who imagine they are in control of all that abundance.

Jesus talks blithely about feeding the children first. But when, like this woman, you know what it means to be hungry, you learn how to cut through tired excuses with plain speech.

“Even dogs get crumbs.”

The master has become the student. The roles are reversed, and Jesus knows it. (may be that’s what he intended – but I prefer to imagine that even Jesus needed a lesson know and then)

Even dogs get crumbs. No amount of privilege can keep abundance at bay. Jesus’ only action is to say “the demon has left your daughter.” He doesn’t try to teach – or explain what just happened. Warrior Woman’s example was clear to all. Speaking the truth to power is an act of liberation. The daughter is healed, and the small crowd in the house – those who know Jesus’ best – are left to wonder what in the world just happened.

The second miracle is anticlimactic. When the man's problem is brought to Jesus' attention, they step aside – outside the public eye. Jesus touches ears and speaks 'Be opened,' and it is so. No more confused speech. No more missed conversations. And the ever-present chorus of voices that attend Jesus declare 'he does everything well.' And I wonder if that means (in this case) not just that he has the gift of healing – but that Jesus has demonstrated that real power knows how to listen and learn. Real power is willing to free the oppressed from the demons that bind them. Real power – God's power – says "be healed' and 'be opened' and those who have been silenced are finally able to become full participants in society.

The miracles of Jesus have always captivated us. They are held up as beacons of hope to people whose hope has been constantly shattered. But what Mark offers us in this encounter with the warrior woman suggests an example is also being given to those in power – to those who imagine they have authority. To these, Jesus demonstrates a glorious humility. The woman speaks truth to him; even dogs get crumbs. And the truth sets her daughter free.

Power can be a dangerous thing. It can also be liberating. The difference between oppression and liberation is one of perspective, and our warrior woman provides the perspective in this case. I want to imagine Jesus nodding and smiling – that embarrassed little smile you make when someone has reminded you of the obvious – when he responds with his words of healing. I know this story is about Jesus, but warrior woman is the hero. And God sees, and God smiles on the courage, the simplicity, the determination of those who take justice seriously, and speak truth to power.

In Jesus' name, may we be willing to do the same.