

St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

Sunday 27th August, 2017

First Peoples & the body of Christ

GOSPEL READING Matthew 15:21-28 *The Canaanite Woman's Faith*

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

EPISTLE Romans 12:1-5 *The New Life in Christ*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus' encounter with a Canaanite woman is perhaps one of the hardest and most disturbing stories we have about him. This is not Jesus, meek and mild tending to the sheep. It is not the feisty Jesus calling out hypocrisy of religious leaders. Jesus appears to lack justice, care, and compassion as we begin this story.

Just before our gospel passage, Jesus has been in familiar territory. We see the feisty Jesus as he upsets the rule makers by saying rules are not important – it is what come from the heart that matters. And now we see him move from the inside to the outside where he meets an outsider, a Canaanite woman.

Our world is full of rules, expectations, cultural norms. They define what is good and evil; what is clean and unclean. Rules define who belongs to the tribe and who is an alien. Rules put up boundaries, fences, walls by those with power against those who lack it.

What is interesting is that the woman uses language reserved for insiders. *Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David*, she says. She laments because her daughter is tormented by a demon. The word used here (krazo) is one reserved for the deepest of cries. Think of Peter crying to Jesus as he sinks in the waves. Or Jesus crying out on the cross as he is dying.

It might be the lament we hear from asylum seekers or Aboriginal Australians, if only we could hear their lament.

Jesus is not gracious towards her. I think I can say his abrupt response was a little 'Dutch' in tone. *It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*

But she will not be dismissed easily. Even a crumb is enough. Even a crumb! And this persistence seems to shake Jesus from the comfortable rules that belong to the inside, and move him to respond from the heart. *Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.*

There is a lot going on in the public sphere at the moment, and it is easy to find examples of krazo, a deep crying out in protest. Liberal State MP Russell Broadbent was moved by an article in the Guardian by David Marr. Marr criticised Christians in Parliament who were spending so much energy on the marriage debate. He wrote, *“If only Christians fought like this for refugees. Imagine if the Coalition’s big men of faith threatened to tear down their own government unless it brings home the wretches we’ve imprisoned in the Pacific. Surely there couldn’t be a greater service for Christ?”*

Krazo – lament and deep cry to right wrongs.

Moved by this article, Broadbent spoke against his party’s policy on asylum seekers with the conviction of one who follows Jesus Christ. A deep lament to right the wrongs of this world.

We also saw it last week when George Brandis spoke from the heart about Hanson wearing a burqa in the senate. Krazo is a faithful cry against injustice from the heart. It doesn’t follow neat rules or the scripting of a party line.

It is perhaps what the apostle Paul is talking about in his letter to the Roman church. *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Or as J.B. Phillips has translated this: *Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within.*

Given what has happened in the gospel incident, I’d suggest we let God re-mould our hearts from within, to let krazo move us to justice and compassion and forego the comforts of rules and power.

I have long been moved towards justice and compassion for Indigenous Australians. It has been a surprising journey over many years – one that has confronted me anew in the last few months with a story I had not really heard before. I will share that story a little later.

The Canaanite woman cried out for her daughter. Russell Broadbent cried out for people seeking asylum. George Brandis cried out for people of the Islamic faith. As followers of Jesus, we cannot just walk past these issues in our world. These are cries for crumbs from our table of plenty.

When you listen to the words that come from your heart, are they words of inclusion, love, care and compassion? Are they words that bring hope and healing?