



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, August 16, 2020

Nevertheless She Persisted

by Garland F. Pierce

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

15:10 Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand:

15:11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

15:12 Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?"

15:13 He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

15:14 Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit."

15:15 But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us."

15:16 Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding?"

15:17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?

15:18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

15:19 For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

15:20 These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

15:21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

15:22 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."

15:23 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."

15:24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

15:25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

15:26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

15:27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

In this passage, there is a lot of talk about clean and unclean! Then, Jesus and his disciples arise and go to the district of Tyre and Sidon, a largely Gentile region, the land of the unclean! There is an encounter with a woman. Matthew describes her as a Canaanite woman. Mark describes her as a Syrophoenician woman. What we know for certain is that she ain't Jewish. Jesus knows this. The disciples know this. And the woman knows this. But, somehow she also knows that this Jewish rabbi has what she needs—the ability to heal and free her tormented and at-risk daughter. So much so until she approaches him and the disciples and makes her need plainly known. She will not go away. She will not stop pleading her case. She will not stop shouting.

This is where it get uncomfortable for many Christians. Jesus, the one who bids "Come unto me," seems to dismiss this woman even in the face of her profound need. Faced with her need, the disciples advocate that she be sent away. Jesus plainly expresses that his gifts are reserved for the chosen, for his kind, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Nevertheless she persisted. To his initial statement of objection, she persisted. To his comment about bread, children, and dogs, she persisted with her own about crumbs that ARE made available. And Jesus praised her great faith and healed her daughter. She believed in Jesus' power. She persisted in that faith that change was possible, despite obstacles or rejection. She advocated for her child who did not have the ability to advocate for herself. She persisted, prevailed, and saw the change she desired. Hers was a faith lesson that persists even today.

It seems like ancient history; but, in 2017, US Senator Elizabeth Warren was silenced by the senate, using an obscure senate rule. When asked about it, US Senator Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, "Sen. Warren was giving a lengthy speech. She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, giving women the right to vote (ratified August 18, 1920). Senator Warren, a former presidential candidate, persisted. Now, just days from the centennial anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, Senator Kamala Harris has been named the Democratic candidate for the office of Vice President of the USA, the first woman, the first person of African or Asian descent to be so named. She was a part of the lists of accomplished women who ran for president and to be considered for vice president. She and they persisted, as did countless women before them—

suffragettes and abolitionists, Jarena Lee and Charlotte Maxeke. Many have persisted with faith, members of the Women's Missionary Society and the Negro Women's Club movement and women in ministry appointed to far-flung charges and church school teachers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters all over the world, believing change was possible, believing with Jesus' help, they could be the change they sought. What we say of women of faith can be said of men of faith as well.

The call to faith is a call to persistence. It is a call to advocate for our freedom and for the freedom of those unable to advocate for themselves. Is it political? Well, yes! Is it faithful? Absolutely! **Persist!**

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—When have traditions, beliefs, or preconceived notions kept you from responding to someone in need?

PRAY:

O God, we persist and we advocate, because our faith is in you and your power to save and set free. We pray in the name of the one who came to save and free us ALL, Jesus, AMEN

ACT:

1. Is there some issue or matter which you need to address and advocate on behalf of yourself, your family, your church, or your community? How will you do it (write, call, speak up, educate, protest)? Make a plan. For those US citizens, here are some practical actions to take: Participate in the current democratic processes (voter registration, voting, completing the 2020 census and encouraging others to do so—See: <http://www.amev-alert.org> and <https://2020census.gov>.) For everyone, practice social distancing as much as possible, wash your hands often, and wear face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Lord, I Hear of Showers of Blessing
AMEC Hymnal, #310

1. Lord, I hear of showers of blessing Thou art scattering full and free;
Showers the thirsty land refreshing; Let some drops now fall on me;
Even me, Even me, Let some drops now fall on me.
2. Pass me not, O gracious Father, Sinful though my heart may be;
Thou mightst leave me, but the rather Let Thy mercy light on me;
Even me, Even me, Let Thy mercy light on me.
3. Pass me not, O tender Savior, Let me love and cling to Thee;
I am longing for Thy favor; While Thou'rt calling, O call me,

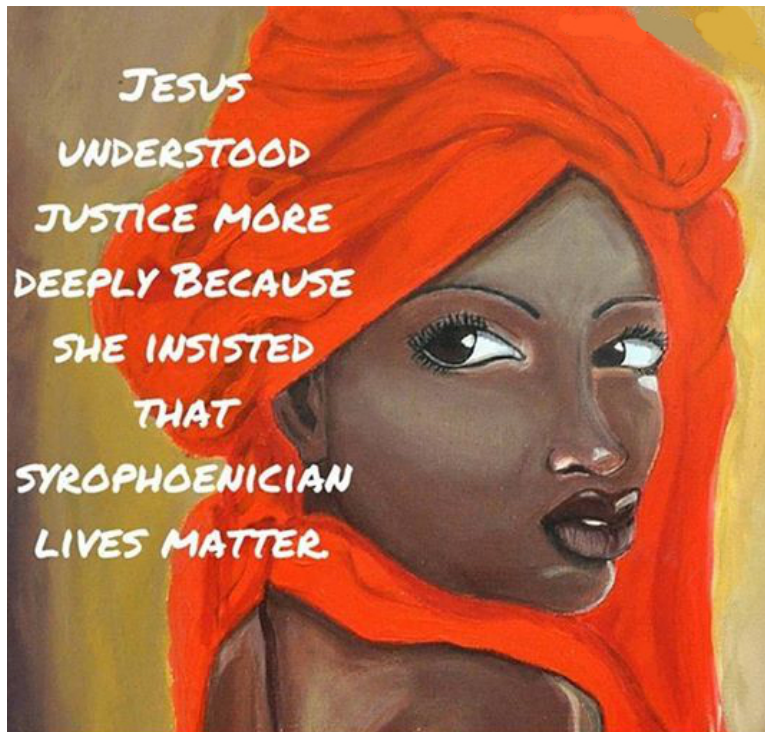
E-ven me, E-ven me, While Thou'rt call-ing, O call me.

4. Pass me not, O might-y Spir-it, Thou canst make the blind to see;
Wit-ness-er of Je-sus' mer-it, Speak some word of power to me,
E-ven me, E-ven me, Speak some word of power to me.
5. Love of God, so pure and change-less, Blood of Christ, so rich, so free,
Grace of God, so strong and bound-less, Mag-ni-fy them all in me,
E-ven me, E-ven me, Mag-ni-fy them all in me. A-men.

Alternative Arrangement: *Even Me*, Patrick Lundy & the Ministers of Music. Album: Standin'
<https://youtu.be/kaLiuVUPOQY>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.