

**Sermon 8-16-20**  
**Paul Purdue preaching**

**She Keeps Shouting**

How does one preach about the mysteries of our faith? Do we explain the holy or open space for awe? The Apostle Paul said, "Think of us (preachers) as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries." (1 Corinthians 4:1)

When reading the Bible our presumptions about holy mystery color our understanding and application. In our lesson today, our approach to the divinity and humanity of Jesus may make a difference. Indeed, the question "who is Jesus" always affects how we live as Christ followers. Our UMC second Article of Religion states, "*The Child (Son), who is the Word of The Creator (Father), the very and eternal God, of one substance with The Creator, took human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Human-hood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Human, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile Christ's Creator to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of humanity.*" (adapted to reflect pronouns and descriptions of our God who dwells in but above gender. The "m" in man is capitalized in the Discipline) If we could reduce Jesus' divinity and humanity into historical facts or theological formulas, would we leave enough space in our souls for worship?

Let us pray: Lord, open our hearts, open our minds and open our souls to worship You in spirit and in truth. Amen.

There are four actors in Matthew 15: Jesus (whom we name as fully God, fully human), the disciples, the Pharisees, and an unnamed Canaanite woman.

The Canaanite woman is unnamed. Her daughter is deeply troubled. Her nationality is pointed out because she is unwelcomed, unanswered, stereotyped and slandered. She shouts outside the circle and must argue her way into a blessing. Was she unnamed due to the insidious sin of sexism or unnamed so that we might easily place ourselves in her shoes? Although unnamed, she is not without power. Indeed, perhaps her encounter with Jesus challenges Jesus' sense of mission so deeply that Jesus comes to redefine his mission field beyond the narrow boundaries of tending to *Israel's lost sheep*. The Gospels conclude with Jesus sending us on a more expansive mission to "*Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1: 7; 2)

There are the Pharisees, who the disciples hope not to offend. I wish the gospels didn't use the word Pharisees or in John's Gospel the even worse use of "the Jews". Jesus and everyone in the story is Jewish except the Canaanite woman. The church has sinned and done great harm to the Jewish people. When we hear a label like "Pharisee", we excuse ourselves from self reflection, assuring ourselves that we are not "those people". The Pharisees were the most devout practitioners of Biblical ethics; some were a bit liberal, others more literal. The Pharisees quoted Scripture and longed to see God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven. The Pharisees ran the food pantries, opened the shelters, bought the backpacks, and drove the church van to pick up people

for Room in the Inn. Most likely Jesus and the disciples were Pharisees. The disciples worry that Jesus is stepping on friendly toes.

In Matthew 15, Jesus had just preached *"Listen and understand. It's not what goes into the mouth that contaminates a person in God's sight. It's what comes out of the mouth that contaminates the person... Out of the heart come evil thoughts, violence, unfaithfulness, pornea, stealing, falsehood, and insults."* After preaching and healing, Jesus traveled into a Greek region. *A local Canaanite woman came out and kept shouting, "Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession." But Jesus didn't respond to her at all.* How can Jesus, perfect in humanity and divinity, fail to address a parent pleading for their suffering child?

*Now the disciples came and urged Jesus, "Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us."* The disciples see the shouting suffragette as the problem. The church often says, "get these problem people out of here". Indeed, we have woven a confession of our sinful inaction into our Communion liturgy: *Merciful God,...we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

It is a mystery why the unmanned woman keeps on shouting after a church that won't answer her charge? Why does she keep on pushing on doors that are closed to Canaanites? Why does she persevere? As Rev. Heather Harriss chatted, Heather suggested this unnamed woman sees something beautiful, hopeful, and life-changing within Jesus. She sees God's Love in Jesus that perhaps, choked by tradition, Jesus can't get a handle on in that moment. Oh, if you find yourself unwelcomed by the church, keep shouting after us, keep persisting. We need your voice to fully be The Body of Christ! But forewarned, we are imperfect people- we will miss the mark- we will sometimes break each other's hearts- let us know when we do! Keep shouting.

Oh for the day when we no longer say, *"Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us."* Oh for the day instead of defending ourselves, we might ask ourselves, "Is that me? And we might ask those standing outside of our familiar circles: "How have I hurt you"? I hope Jesus only addressed the disciples when he replied, *"I've been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel."* But if she heard Jesus' narrow vision and persisted-she deserves even more credit.

When the disciples drew in to hear how Jesus might answer the shouting problem, I imagine that she broke into the closed circle. *She comes face to face before Jesus and pleads, "Lord, help me." And Jesus replies, "It is not good to take the children's bread and toss it to dogs."* I think if I had witnessed this interaction I might have walked away from Jesus completely. It's gross. Nevertheless, she persists. *"Yes, Lord. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their master's table."* Jesus answered, *"Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish."* And right then her daughter was healed.

She-Who-Keeps-Shouting -After-Us and the parable of the persistent widow tell us to keep pressing for justice and inclusion. (Luke 18) But, what do we do with this unflattering portrait of Jesus? Some might embrace a sick kind of Christian nationalism or other self-serving or neighbor-excluding theology. I think instead this unflattering portrait asks us to ponder the mystery of Jesus' complete humanity and complete divinity. It seems to me that Jesus' understanding and definition of his mission was

challenged and changed by her persistence. Instead of just being *sent to the lost sheep of Israel*, Jesus will send us out to proclaim hope and justice *to the whole world*. This unnamed ancient suffragette is the story's hero. Maybe she deserves a co-writing royalty for Jesus' Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations... not just the lost sheep of Israel! (Matthew 28 or Luke 24)

I wonder as Jesus looked the unnamed woman in the eyes and heard her argument, if his own words began stirring inside Christ's sacred head: "*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, violence, adultery, pornea, theft, false testimonies, and insults. These contaminate a person in God's sight... but unwashed hands (or Canninitte hands... maybe they do not matter to God).*" How can I love my neighbor as myself if I think a Canaanite plea matters less than my own?

John Wesley believed that spiritual perfection in this life was not a matter of human belief or divine knowledge. No, to be perfect in this life was to be perfect in love. Did you, like me, grow up with an image of Jesus that was so puffed up with divine knowledge there was no real room for Jesus' humanity? I could not admit the possibility that Jesus might need to learn anything, despite Luke 2:52 telling us that Jesus got lost in the Temple and then, "*Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.*" Jesus inherited a theology, taught to him by imperfect people. We all do. No doubt, Jesus heard people regularly "thank God that they were not "gentile dogs!" Surely, a five year old human Jesus did not correct an uncouth uncle or surely roofer when they called a gentile "a dog".

It is not a sin to be raised on and maybe even believe imperfect theology. It may be our human condition. However, it seems sinful to fail to deeply examine our lives when others *keep shouting after us*. We call it a sin "*when we fail to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to hear the cries of the needy*" (and perhaps the shouts of the excluded)? How long will we *keep on sending them away*- denying God's beloved all of the Church's blessings? Surely, it is sinful to worry so over religious externals instead of addressing our own: *violence, unfaithfulness, pornea, theft, falsehoods, and insults that break God's heart*? How long will we keep on rebelling against God's love? When will we stop saying, "*Send them away*"? Come Lord Jesus. Forgive us. Free us for joyful obedience!" Perhaps, Jesus' perfected humanity involves learning new things even about practise and theology. Perhaps, Jesus calls us all to learn. And so, friends, hang on when the church breaks your heart. Keep shouting after us.

And whether you agree with this sermon or take offense with it: Worship. Life is a holy mystery. Kindle awe. Beauty, faith, hope, and love are sacred mysteries. "Christ in us" may be the most elusive of all holy mysteries. So, stop fighting to figure it out. "*Stop-kicking against the goads*" (The Risen Christ's words to Paul in Acts 9). Jesus' divinity and humanity is a mystery. Worship. Oh, "*Sages, leave your contemplations... Come and worship, come and worship. Worship Christ- Our (renewing) King!*" Hang on like Jacob wrestling with God and life. Keep looking for water in the wilderness. Come like the unnamed Canaanite woman demanding your place at the table- Keep shouting after us. But worship! Come and see in Christ's face, a love that surpasses knowledge, a faith that changes everything, a hope that heals us,

and holy justice that burns within until we love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Amen.