

## Breaking Boundaries

Wayne Waibel – 08/16/2020

We live in a time of upheaval and fear. Boundaries are being erected everywhere you go. You must wear a mask. You must not get closer than six feet to another live human body. And those boundaries have become a moving target, sometimes changing within the very same day. How in the world are we to locate peace?

.....

Allow me to expand the liturgy a bit for today. Before Jesus ignored the Canaanite woman, He had this to say in response to the Jewish elite. It precedes immediately in front of our lesson for today:

**1** Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,

**2** "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

**3** He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

**4** For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

**5** But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"--

**6** then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

**7** Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

**8** 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

**9** And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

**17** ...whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated.

**18** But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

**19** For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

**20** These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Here Jesus is once again breaking boundaries. In this case – Jewish tradition that has been modified over generations to the point that it has become nothing more than a method to maintain a hold over the very people they were supposed to serve.

.....

Much as we like to think of ourselves as enlightened, we still hold on to a few biases that simply won't let us go. One of the most tenacious in my life is the conservative gene my mother implanted in me. She was a card-carrying member of the John Birch Society. Voted Republican in every election for every office. Watched the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite until he retired. We didn't talk politics in my house when we were growing up. No need – everybody knew where my mother stood.

My dad was the epitome of mellow. He didn't get very excited about such things either way. I think he secretly voted Democrat religiously – not to cancel my mom's vote – but to make things even. So, I come by my right leanings as a result of environment coupled with a lack of post-secondary education. Since I didn't go to college, I've had no liberal influence whatsoever.

Because of my inherent conservative bias, when I get to this story in Matthew about a poor Canaanite woman calling upon Jesus to heal her daughter only to have the Master completely ignore her – I just stop. I go back and read it again, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. He'd heard her, yet completely dismissed her.

This does not put a favorable glow on the Son of Man. And then He doubles down on it by revealing the prevailing Jewish attitude towards Canaanites to say nothing of a Canaanite woman, and a poor Canaanite woman at that – by speaking to His disciples as though she is not even there that, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” WOW!

.....

How did this episode get included in the Canon? What purpose could it possibly serve other than to put an exclamation point on the division between Jew and Gentile? It may help to understand that the author of Matthew was writing to a young church whose members were primarily non-Jewish Christians – a solid minority in first century Palestine. They could strongly identify with the Canaanite woman. To them she would have been a hero.

Saying yes to great things means having to say no to good things. And some biblical scholars will argue that Jesus was not yet at that point in His ministry where it had been revealed to Him that His redemptive mission had been extended beyond the children of Israel to include all mankind.

As the story of Joseph illustrates that God never lets us go, the Canaanite woman embodies the boundary breaking action that there is no one beyond the reach of grace. Not a lowly marginalized woman shackled with a demon-possessed child – not a Messiah. In both cases, God’s mercy is enough.

Jesus does not always come through for us as we expect. That is a truth you will become very familiar with as you embark on your mission of breaking boundaries. But He will always come through.

.....

The thing about breaking boundaries is quite often we are completely unaware that we are doing so. The real pioneers were the ones that were tending to a perceived need that had nothing whatever to do with boundaries in their minds. Today’s crop of wannabe’s out in the streets screaming for whatever social injustice, are for the most part malcontents with a handy excuse. The real boundary breaking is done in a calm deliberate manner.

Once the hyperbole subsides and cooler heads prevail, you’ll start to see the agents of change at work. When the SARS epidemic quieted down – the rush to find a vaccine was halted. You won’t see that this time around. Had we followed through then, we may have eliminated our current dilemma entirely. We would have been positioned better in the battle against COVID for certain.

The tragic death of George Floyd served as a catalyst for social justice at a time when we were much more vulnerable to the infiltration of anarchists and politically polarized as a nation. A veritable petri dish of unrest coupled with huge blocks of people with way too much time on their hands.

And now it no longer matters who is elected to the highest position in the land. You can be sure that whomever it is – the other side will be launching a campaign to get them removed before they even take the oath of office. That is what has become of this once great nation. Time for some long-held boundaries to be broken.

The good news is that if Jacob, a mortal man can wrestle a blessing out of God Himself, and a poor woman from the wrong side of the tracks can elicit a miracle out of the Savior of the world when He is not in the mood to be trifled with such things – we have half a shot at a little boundary breaking ourselves.

And it's a good thing. What lies ahead is danger, strife and fear in the world. But we know that Christ has already overcome all those boundaries to peace on earth, so we are in excellent shape. Shall we begin? Amen.