

It's what comes out of the mouth...

Matthew 15: 10-20, 21-28

Aug 20, 2017

All our cultures, civilisations and religions have rules; rules about what is good and what is evil, what is clean and what is unclean, who belongs and who doesn't... These rules are boundaries, walls and fences to keep privilege and power within and to defend against those on the other side, whoever they may be.

In the reading from Matthew's gospel, Jesus says to the crowd, the insiders, 'Get this, you know, it's not what you put into your mouth that makes you clean or unclean, it's what comes out of your mouth, from your heart that matters, and if its rank, that's what defiles you, that's what makes you unfit for the blessing of belonging to God's realm'. Alarmed, the disciples take Jesus aside and tell him that the Pharisees, the keepers of ritual purity, are offended. Of course they are. Jesus is threatening the boundaries, rupturing the rules. He's talking about purity of the heart and not ritual purity; it's an internal and not an external thing. It can't be controlled or contained, measured or monitored like the external laws, it bypasses the earthly powers and disarms them.

Jesus moves on, away from the insider crowd and into a region of unfamiliar territory, on the cultural edge. Here he meets a woman from Canaan, who addresses him in a title that belongs to the insiders, although she's not one of them. She's claiming something that is not hers to claim and she cries out, she cries out for healing for her daughter.

This 'cry out' word in Greek is *Krazo* (pronounced *Krad'zo*). It's the same word used to describe the disciple's cry on seeing Jesus walking towards their boat in a storm, the same word used to describe Peter's terror at sensing his impending doom when he tries to join Jesus on the water, it's the same word to describe Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross near the end of the gospel. It's a cry from the deep, calling the deep.

Jesus responds abruptly, reminding her of the rules, telling her that she's not one of the insiders. Maybe he's tired, maybe he's overwhelmed by the unrelenting need of the crowds who keep forming around him, maybe he's scared that somehow his power might be finite and he doesn't want to waste it, or he's going beyond his job description. Whatever it is, she's not being dismissed. Even after the disciples tell Jesus to send her away, she comes to him on her knees, as if bowing before the king, offering her loyalty in return for his blessing. His words are a rejection of her offering, invoking the justice of the insiders, 'It's not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' Then from the deep she answers in agreement. 'Yes, Lord.' She is not one of the chosen children, but all she needs is the crumb that falls from the table into the mouth of the dogs. Her faith tells her that the crumb will be enough, enough to save her child.

Jesus answers, not from the rules but from deep answering deep, 'Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.' and she receives that blessed crumb from the table, she receives what must have felt like a banquet of heaven; her daughter is healed and she is no longer an outsider.

There's a lot of debate going on right now about rules, and who is an insider and who is an outsider. Who can get married and who can't get married. Who has rights to land and law and who doesn't have rights and whose law is it anyway. Who can live here and who can't live here and what do we do with those who come uninvited to the table?

In an article on marriage equality, around the views of Tony Abbott and the 'Bishops' in the Guardian on Wednesday 9 August, journalist David Marr 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?*"

On Wed Aug 16th, the Victorian Liberal MP Russell Broadbent, told parliament he was inspired to speak out against the government's offshore detention policy because of a line in this article which, Broadbent says, 'struck a chord'. When Broadbent read the line '*If only Christians fought like this for refugees*', he said '*I couldn't walk past*'. It's not often that we see politicians publically defying allegiance to the party because they want to serve Christ. Here was something from the deep calling out for justice, calling out for even just a crumb from the table, calling out against the rules and policies that ignore and exclude people and try to make them invisible, try to silence their cries. *Krazo*; the cry of dereliction; the cry that must be heard and will not be dismissed.

When Pauline Hanson wore a burqa into parliament on Thursday, George Brandis' response was measured and calm, but it was *Krazo*, a cry from the heart, you could tell on his face and in his voice how appalled he was at this offensive act against a people of faith. As I listened to a report on the radio, something inside me cried out, *Krazo*, cried out for understanding and healing, cried out for mercy for our foolish and selfish ways, cried out for the people who were being victimised by the ignorance and arrogance of others.

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, through your mouth, are they words of inclusion, love, care and compassion? Are they words that bring hope and healing? At some time or other, we could all do with a reminder to open our heart before we open our mouth.
- Who does your heart cry out for? Take a moment to listen and to offer your prayer.

from 'The Spirituality of Conflict' readings:

Boundary breaking God,
You crossed unimaginable space to dwell among us.
Your love erased the limits of human love.
As we are held in your unconditional acceptance
May we be courageous and scandalously generous
in our love for others
And so, however imperfectly, mirror your gift to us,

*and may the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you.
Amen.*

Blessings, Jennie

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