

A 2014 Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28 Lectionary 20 pr.15  
14-08-17 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,  
Jesus Christ....Amen.....

Many of you have probably heard that actor, comedian Robin Williams died this last week. He was a funny, funny, man whom we knew as Mork, Popeye, Genie, and Patch Adams. He was in so many movies from Dead Poets Society to Good Morning Vietnam to the Bird Cage and Night at the Museum.

He was a funny, funny man who fought inner demons. He battled addiction and depression and most recently he was dealing with the beginning stages of Parkinson's which he was trying to keep quiet.

The trouble with inner demons is that they are inner. They torment us, they take up our energy and our thoughts and actions as we try to appear normal to the world outside. But it can be exhausting and lonely.

Because they're hidden, for the most part. That's why it's inner. But they're hidden in part because we don't want anyone else to see it. We might feel ashamed. We might worry about what people would think of us if they only knew. So we work hard at keeping inner demons inner. We keep fighting these things... on our own... Thinking that fighting is what strong people do and asking for help is not.

Somehow our culture propagates the solitary warrior myth by stigmatizing mental health on the one hand and then shunning or mocking medications on the other. I have friends who are on depression medication who have stopped taking it. And when we ask them why, they say, "I was feeling so much better that I thought I could do without it."

There may be any number of reasons that would make them want to get off the medication – maybe there are side-effects or other health concerns; but for many people, they feel ashamed that they need something to balance their body. They are victims of the myth that if you have to take medication, then you are not normal, that you are somehow worth less than those who aren't taking a medication, that it's okay to take a medication if you absolutely have to, but best to get off it quickly.

But it's just chemistry. And sometimes, maybe for the rest of your lifetime, we need help with body chemistry, like we need glasses, or a pacemaker, or a new knee,... or confession.

The fact of the matter is that there is no true standard for "normal." That not taking a medication doesn't necessarily make someone more normal than if you do. That **balance** might be normal no matter what it takes for us reach that. But that each one of us proves that the standard for "normal" is that we are all different. And that difference is what our God celebrates and welcomes.

Not that we have conditions and diseases to suffer through because God **wants** us to suffer or punish us or even for the **sake** of variety. But that even our conditions and diseases do not separate us from God's love. Society, the crowd, congregations, even disciples might wish that Jesus would just send us away.

But because of the woman in this story, who fought hard for her daughter who was overcome by outer demons, we know that not only will Jesus NOT send us away, he will give us a voice, hear our voice, and praise our faith.

So today we join Jesus and the disciples on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Matthew is quite clear in his gospel that he is writing to the house of Israel. So clear in fact that he only includes a few encounters with Gentiles – the visit of the Magi bearing gifts to the newborn king; the Centurion who asked for Jesus to heal his servant; and, the story today about the Canaanite woman begging for Jesus to heal her daughter.

Jesus left the Sea of Galilee and travelled west to Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean Sea. Matthew doesn't tell us why, and after this story with the woman, Jesus is back in Galilee.

So he invades the land of the Canaanites, a woman of the area comes up to him right away \*shouting\* and begs for mercy – her daughter is tormented by a demon... The barking of the dog...

Jesus ignores her.... The chorus of the shepherd.

She keeps shouting.... The barking of the dog....

The disciples urged him to send her away – we don't know if they want him to heal the daughter or not, but just send the woman away. The chorus of the sheep...

She keeps shouting. The barking of the dog....

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The chorus of the shepherd....

She comes and kneels before him, “Lord, help me.” The whimper of the dog...

“It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” The chorus of the shepherd...

“Yes lord,... yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.” The confidence of the dog....

“Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” The chorus of the shepherd....

The woman shouts for mercy. Before she has a glimmer of hope...

Jesus:

gives her the silent treatment

proclaims that he has only come for Israel, and...

calls her a dog...

The woman, the mom, claims that title of dog... even of a dog. And still she honors Jesus, he's the master of the table after all, and she begs for just a crumb.... “Jesus you have so much, you're capable of so much.”....

Some people see no problem with this story.

Some are offended at the way that Jesus treats her – ignoring her and calling her a dog!

Some come to Jesus' rescue and say that he knows what he will do all along, the he is just testing her. But who wants a God that plays with us in such a way?

Some say that she changes Jesus' mind, that she teaches him something.

Some say that this story is proof that going to Jesus in prayer might actually work.

Some say that Jesus followed every social convention of the day for a conversation between a Jewish man and a foreign woman – and even using the offensive system he was still able to help her... to let her speak... to give volume to her voice...

Whatever the case here, by the end of the story,

the demon is gone,

the daughter is healed,

and Jesus the Son of God is the Messiah for Jewish people,

for Magi from the East,

for Centurions and their servants,

for Canaanite-Arab women and their daughters,  
for lost sheep and barking dogs,  
for those tormented by demons both outer and inner –  
and by extension – for you.  
Jesus the Messiah is for you with all your inner and outer demons –  
for the addicted and the depressed,  
the recovering and the medicated,  
those in denial and those who face too much reality.....  
Those who think themselves to be normal and  
those who know enough to know and celebrate that they are different,  
which makes them normal! Jesus is for you. Jesus is for all of you.

Amen.....