

Who are you? What is GOD's Plan for you? What do you care about more than anything else? The 1st question we ask every person wanting to be Christian, when they want to be Baptized, which is admission to Communion, whenever they want to be Confirmed as members of the Church, is "Who is your LORD and Savior?" The answer we look for is "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior!" this is formulaic, what we are asking is "What is the greatest authority in your life/the priority above all other?" If a choice between the King, the Pharaoh, the Government, Political Party, Family, Friends, Reputations, Debt VERSUS Jesus, What do you do? If the choice was between SACRED RELIGIOUS TEACHING and Compassion for your own loved one, would you argue with GOD?

Years ago, a friend asked me to Preach at her Ordination, before her Church and before the Presbytery. What I knew going into this was that her Call had been controversial, because for this 180 year-old struggling inner-city congregation located between a Bar and a Strip Club, the new Pastor wanted to create a program for street kids, some of whom were homeless, none of whom came from the Church. I saw a gang of 30 kids, aged 7 to 17, hanging out at the door and spontaneously invited them to come in, we could not continue worship until they came in. They took me literally and came up on the Chancel and sat down or lay down on the Chancel, in front of the Presbytery all wearing their robes and stoles and the parishioners on a Sunday afternoon dressed for Church. SO, I began talking the sermon to Street Kids, as well as to the Congregation and Presbytery. At which point one of the kids asked: "Do you really believe all that?" And before responding "Absolutely" I thought to myself: "this day I sure hope I do!"

Fun fact, the stories of Genesis were not written down until after King David. The earliest memory of Israel is as having been slaves of Pharaoh, making the Book of Exodus the Beginning Book in the Hebrew Bible.

This Pharaoh does not recall that Joseph/ Israel/ GOD had saved Egypt during a 7 year Famine, only that there are more Hebrews than Egyptians in Egypt, and he responds in fear. Out of FEAR instead of FAITH or MEMORY of GOD, Pharaoh began to create a set of FEAR-FILLED Laws, First, he made All the Hebrews: Slaves, oppressing them with hard labor so they will build up Egypt, and will not have strength to fight against!

Second, Pharaoh orders the Midwives to act against their vows. We had Midwives in the birth of each of our children. For the first, the Midwife named it was a slow night and records had not come with us in the move, so she supervised my delivering the baby. In the second, the cord was round his neck and the baby delivered within 30 minutes, so the Midwives did all the work as I hugged my wife. The identity of Midwives is to ensure the mother and baby have every opportunity at LIFE. But Pharaoh ordered that if it is a male baby, they were to kill the child before the mother can hold it. SHIPHRAH & PUAH, the first two persons named in the Book of Exodus, the Hebrew Bible are these midwives, who resolve that their oath to GOD is more important than the authority of Pharaoh. Their justification to Pharaoh is that Hebrew Women are more vigorous than Egyptians (which plays into his fear of the Hebrews) and they deliver their babies before the Midwives can get there.

Pharaoh then makes a 3rd Law, that Every Male life be thrown into the Nile to die. The farce of this is that the River Nile was understood to be The Source of Life, so you are to kill male babies by placing them into the Source of Life?! There is a Hebrew couple, meaning they believe in GOD among a Nation who believed in Pharaoh and Egyptian Gods; and this couple are each of the family of LEVI, who became the Priesthood. This couple became Pregnant having a baby Boy, whom they see as "BLESSED and good" reminiscent of GOD's words of Blessing in Genesis' Creation story. When she can hide the baby no longer, the mother places the baby in the Waters of Chaos reminiscent of the story of the FLOOD, even to the point of creating an ark to keep the baby safe. Pharaoh's own daughter finds the basket, and the most important word in the entire Chapter, **SHE HAD COMPASSION**. She knew her father's Law, she knew why the Baby was in the Nile, and YET SHE HAD COMPASSION.

Matthew 15 also includes a woman challenging the authority of a man. Someone this week sent me a cartoon of Snoopy sitting atop his doghouse at the typewriter authoring a Theology Book, when asked by Charlie Brown what Snoopy will title this book about God, he replies “Did you ever think you were wrong?”

Which raises the underlying question of this story: “Do you believe Jesus can learn?”

According to the ancient Creeds, what sets God apart as being GOD is being Omnipotent=All Powerful; Omnipresent=In Every Place; Omniscient=All Knowing; and Eternal. However Jesus is also totally HUMAN, and one of things that makes us Human is making mistakes which provides our opportunity to learn.

The customary way to interpret this is that Jesus was testing the Canaanite woman to see if her wisdom and faith measured up...But that interpretation kind of makes Jesus out to be “a Jerk.” Here is a Mother begging for the life of her daughter; and Jesus was testing her to see if she is worthy?! The alternative understanding is that we recognize the Disciples and Jesus, each dismiss her according to their Culture and LAWS, first as being a Woman, Second as not being Jewish but an indigenous Canaanite, who were not Genetically pure, did not keep Kosher, and did not worship in the Temple. How difficult it is for us today, to understand this level of bigotry against women and indigenous persons.

I went to one of the most prestigious of seminaries, at the time these were Princeton, Harvard, Yale and Union, the majority of graduates going on to be Professors, however that was also the era of Liberation Theology and Feminism. I had two classes, where as men, we were allowed to attend, but not to be called on for our answers or to ask questions; we were expected to perform all of the required work, but only receive credit for auditing; because those had been the experiences of women especially women of color when the Professors were in school 50 years ago in America.

A difficulty of understanding the Bible and human life, is that we ALWAYS need to consider not just the **Content but the Context**. Today’s reading began at Chapter 15 verse 21, where the first 20 verses of that Chapter describe what may seem unrelated teachings, beginning with the Pharisees complaining Jesus’ Disciples were not following tradition; THEN from Jesus: “What matters is not what goes into a person, i.e. Following KOSHER, rather what comes out of a person makes them pure or defiled...” ending with a list of evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. For good measure Jesus offers guidance to leave the Pharisees be, because they are BLIND GUIDES, and “If a blind man leads a blind man they will both fall in a Pit.” I believe Matthew placing the story of this Canaanite Woman in this context (which occurs in no other of the Gospels, only here) is this WOMAN who was considered sinful because she was indigenous and a woman, She teaches Jesus! When Jesus does condescend to respond to her, Jesus says “I was sent only for the Lost Sheep of Israel” and “It is not right to toss the children’s bread to the dogs!” Now there are those among us, who love their dogs so much as to believe it wrong to share the Dog’s food with their children! **But the Canaanite Woman kneels in humility before the Savior**, she **addresses him as LORD**, begs that he will help her the exact same wording used on Palm Sunday **“HOSANNA, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY”** then she teaches Jesus by carrying out the thinking of his pun: **“Yes Lord, BUT EVEN DOGS EAT THE CRUMBS THAT FALL FROM THE MASTER’S TABLE!”**

What unites this story to Exodus is that in both, LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE CHANGED BY COMPASSION! I have to believe, that if Jesus can learn and change his mind about healing the daughter of a Canaanite, he had previously referred to as being a Dog, that while GOD has a PLAN, by our FREE WILL ACTS OF COMPASSION we may be able to reveal a different revelation of GOD’s PLAN than had been witnessed ever before.