

Sermon: A Proper 15 2023
20 August 2023
St. Augustine's-in-the-Woods
The Rev. Susan S. Gaumer

Matthew 15:21-28
Genesis 45:1-15
Romans 11:1-2,29-32
Psalm 67

Our readings today don't lack for drama and great surprises! Even changes of heart!

Joseph, sold into slavery by his evil brothers but having risen to great power in Egypt as a result, has confronted his brothers with the truth about himself—that only he has the power to keep his family alive—all this by way of revealing who he really is!

Joseph weeps, calling his brothers closer to listen: The famine will go on, but the family will not starve. Joseph will save them. Then he delivers the punchline:

“What you intended for evil, God intended for good!” The Holy Spirit at work!

Somebody should make a movie about this or a musical show!

I've always loved this scene, imagining the brothers collectively uttering a silent “OH!”

We got it all wrong. It's really Joseph, the kid brother we threw into the pit and then sold as a slave. He's saving our family, not destroying us!

Fast forward a thousand years or more and we encounter Jesus and his disciples, not in Palestine, but in Canaanite territory—Tyre and Sidon, Gentile country where Jews have no business being. The disciples are nervous as Jesus has once again crossed a line.

To make matters worse, a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus shouting to him about her sick daughter: “Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David!” She knows who Jesus is!

Proper Jewish men don't converse with Gentile women! Jesus is stunned!

His disciples urge him to move on, get out of there. Good Jew that he is, Jesus wants no part of her: He know his place, his intended role:

“I was sent only to save the lost sheep of Israel!” But the woman comes on, kneels before him, pleading that he come heal her child. ‘Lord, help me.’

Unmoved, Jesus lashes back with the words “It's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs!” OMG! He's compared her to a “dog!” Not a compliment! The woman persists

“Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table!” I think there is a pause here while Jesus takes it all in. An

“OH!” I imagine in Jesus’ mind. He heals the daughter because of the mother’s great persistence and faith, but I believe Jesus begins to have a change of heart.

What has happened here? What does Jesus understand that he didn’t before? That his mission is to save all of God’s people; not just Jews, even Gentiles? ‘OH!’

A student of mine, having encountered the story asked “Was this Jesus on a Bad Day?”

I think it is Jesus in a very hard time for him, the moment he may have seen the true scope of his vocation and realized that it would cost him everything. “OH!”

I suspect everyone here has experienced an “OH!” Moment or two. We are so very capable of believing what we want to believe even when hard truth stares us in the face.

I imagine some climate change deniers sweltering in this summer’s heat are having

“OH!” Moments. Maybe our dependence on fossil fuels has contributed to this!

Divisions in our nation are largely fueled by refusals to listen to any opinions other than one’s own and to stubbornly defending those opinions even when facts suggest otherwise. Compassion, forgiveness, and compromise have no place when refusal to budge is the only acceptable point of view.

None of us is immune to this kind of stubbornness about our carefully defended opinions, but then something comes along to challenge them.

We’ve all had “Oh!” Moments when we’ve figured out that we love someone enough to want to spend the rest of our life with them or when we realize the truth about someone in our family who has been a mystery until the day we see them for who they really are. Finally I was able to understand my mother enough to feel compassion for her and forgive her. “Oh!”

Like Jesus in today's gospel, Peter and Paul had to wrestle with sharing the story of Jesus with the Gentile world. The Spirit led them to OH experiences that resulted in huge changes of heart.

Too often we seem to think that the Holy Spirit was active in the Bible, but has been on vacation in our own lives. Not so! The Holy Spirit was at work in all of these wonderful stories and is at work in yours and mine.

Pay attention in the days to come. Could it be that you, and of course me, are being nudged by the Spirit to see issues more deeply, to take a wider view that may even lead to a change of heart. OH!