

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

THE CRY OF THE SICK

Matthew 15:21-28

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

21Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23But he did not answer at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24He answered, "I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

DIAGNOSIS: The Sick Who Won't Cry Out Just Don't Get It

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Not Listening*

Let's start with a question: Who's got the problem here? The Canaanite woman perhaps, who has two strikes against her, being both a woman and not an Israelite. Besides, she has a very sick child. Still, she is not afraid to cry out in her need. The

problem really belongs to those who don't have ears to hear, like the disciples or anyone of us, who won't be bothered with the disturbing cries of the anguished. "Send her away" (v. 23)! (Jesus, too, seems to be flip with her, but more on that later).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Distancing Ourselves*

Why is it that we have a need to ignore the cries of the sick, looking the other way, isolating the sick where we don't have to see them? Could it be that they are telling us something about ourselves that we do not want to face, that we do not want to see ourselves as needing mercy? Could it be that we don't want to believe that they are us; that despite all of our comforts, underneath we are sick—and denying our need is far easier than confronting it? And so, we imagine that by distancing ourselves from the cries of the sick we will find a safe place, removed from the suffering masses. How sick is that, to believe that we are healthy and have no need of a physician (Luke 5: 31)?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Excluded*

Those who do not listen to the cries of the sick—who will not identify with their call for help (a voice that is more healthy than it is sick)—also refuse to eat from the Master's table, despising even a crumb of mercy. They, then, go away empty (Luke 1:51-53), undone by their own arrogance and self-righteousness, for indeed the cries of the sick are the voice of God, calling us to get it. And we who send the poor away send God away; leaving to hear only our own weeping and gnashing of teeth with no help available (Matt. 24:51).

PROGNOSIS: The Sick Who Cry Out Really Do Get It

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Heard From the Cross*

When no one else listened to the cry of the anguished mother pleading for her sick daughter, Jesus did, though it appeared

that he was initially unresponsive. True, he seemed to put her off, not once, but twice, as she hangs in there. Could it be that he was drawing her out, because he heard and identified with her? If he came, as the entire New Testament makes quite clear, to become sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), to take on our sicknesses and become the healing of God for all sinners, then he heard her cry—and yours, and mine. In fact, finally he went to the cross to become our sickness, and to cry out for us as he was caught under the power of the evil one and the will of his God and Father. Crying out in his own abandonment, he would be heard by his Father, who, when the struggle was over, would raise Jesus, thereby gathering us all into a community where even the dogs find a home, enjoying health and new life at the Master's table (v. 27). For all "his loud cries and tears..., (and) heard because of his obedient submission" (Hebrews 5:7), Jesus got for us what he came to give.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Drawing Close*

So, recognizing ourselves as the sick, we cry out for mercy, and come to the Table like that mother, living off the mercy of God who hears our cries. And God is ready to give us far more than we either desire or deserve, by making us his children; and all our sicknesses at last give way to "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Indeed, by our faith, we cry out like the woman, and already in our baptism and in the Holy Eucharist, we enjoy the benefits of the living, healing body of Jesus, in whom we get what we believe.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Hearing the Cries of the Sick*

As a result, we no longer need to stifle the cry of the sick—our own or that of others. Instead, we listen for their cries, in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who are suffering and tormented; we open our hearts and minds and selves to their need, persons we live with every day, those in whom we see

Jesus; and we invite them to share with us in his healing body,
hearing their cries as our own.