

SESSION FOUR

Jesus Rudely Interrupted

Prayer: *Merciful God, you sent your Son to earth as Bread for the world, as Manna in the wilderness to rescue your chosen people, hungry for salvation. Often we think of your blessings reserved for those who have a particular status in society and culture. Open your word, breaking silence that we may understand what it means for you to respect no human privilege, nor honor any human characteristic or accomplishment, but receive and grace us with gifts only found in us through the mercy of our Lord, Jesus, as we share the mind of Christ.* ... *Amen.*

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30. This fourth session on breaking silence, is *ajumble* with references to demons and hunger; they are conflated in a narrative that seems to set Jesus' focus on mission to the Jews, whom Brueggemann calls "Jesus' own kind of people." (46) It is in clear opposition to the compassion with which he ordinarily welcomes all the sick and needy whose paths he crosses (note prior interaction with numerous Gentiles in Mark 5:1-31 and Mark 6:53-56).

*"Sir, even the dogs under the table
eat the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:28)*

Perhaps Brueggemann's jumble of ideas is evoked by some confusion in Jesus. He has moved quickly back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, shifting between the culture of temple and synagogues where he is rejected and the demon-filled, Gentile cemetery where "pigs" eagerly take direction from him. *Interrupting Silence* puts us in a strange setting – it's a play, a puppet show perhaps. It opens with a Syro-phonician woman invading a Jewish, man's world. Though this woman is out of bounds and her very presence is jarring, boldly audacious, still her demeanor is mild, respectfully humble. She *begs*, pleading for his help for her daughter. But Jesus returns her a sharp reply! "Let me take care of God's chosen first; it is not fair to take what has been promised to them and throw it to dogs." Ouch!

This foreigner might have been crushed by his words; as an out-of-order woman, she might have been devastated by his look or his tone, but she was not. Something, love for her daughter or her resentment of his scolding, emboldened her to respond. One wonders if she knew about the old Hebrew tradition of gleaning, whereby harvesters were instructed to leave what was excess or fallen to the ground for those who had no fields to harvest, no resources of their own to meet great need. I wonder if she stood and looked Jesus straight in the eye when she said, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

A startled "Whoa...." spreads through the audience of our play. The tension is palpable, as though marionette strings pull everyone toward the stage. What will Jesus do now? How will he answer this upstart – this demanding Gentile and a woman who doesn't know her place?

Questions for meditation/response:

1. Walter Brueggemann talks about a "tribal purity code" (56-57) that enforces silence to maintain political and economic *status quo*, protecting privilege for the dominant culture. Scriptures tell us the Jewish folk were designated as privileged over the Gentiles, but for our day, W. Brueggeman specifically mentions white, western (contrasted with Asian), male and heterosexual people as beneficiaries of protected privilege. How does such privileged status develop? What societal problems are associated with it? What spiritual and practical issues does it raise for Christians and the church today?
2. In this scripture a person without status – foreigner and woman – interrupted the privilege of Jesus and his Jewish friends by asking for things he said she was not entitled to receive. When do you see this happening in our communities? In what way do our legal, ethical, moral and compassionate options encourage outsiders to break silence?
3. Scripture also tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom " (Luke 2:52) In what ways may the story of his interaction with the Syro-phonician woman result in and/or be the result of such growth? Presumably, God expects believers to grow in wisdom, too. What does that look like in you?
4. According to Brueggemann, "our tradition in faith is a long history of inconvenient interruptions" (Have lost this reference; my apologies!) as we respond to the God who is always doing a "new thing" (Isaiah 43:19). What new things of God have interrupted your story in the past? Have you sensed Holy Spirit leading you into new things recently? In what ways is it fearful to think of God doing and asking us to do new things? How is it comforting to find God continuing to act in our time?

(Please share your thoughts in response to one of the four questions above by a "reply to all" email. Include the question in your response.

NOTE: If you requested not to be included in the "group" discussion, your reply will go only to the originator of the email you received for this devotional/study. If you choose not to reply, it is just between you and the Lord.)

Prayer: Merciful God, you sent your Son to earth as Bread for the world, as Manna in the wilderness to rescue your chosen people, hungry for salvation. Nurtured by the Bread of Life, his presence, may Holy Spirit transform us daily into faithful, sensitive followers of Christ, sharing his humility of mind and his compassion of heart for a voiceless world and encouraging them to confidently break any silence we impose on our neighbor. ... Amen!