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If you heard that Gospel reading and cringed a little bit at the way Jesus treated the Syrophenician woman, I get it. That was a different side to Jesus than what we normally hear in the Gospels. Cranky and rude and even racist when he refers to her as a dog not fit to receive the healing miracles that he has been performing all over Galilee for the Jews. If we look back to the days and weeks preceding this encounter, we see so many examples of his compassion and care for people and we have to ask ourselves...what's different here?

The short answer, I think is that what we are glimpsing in this passage speaks to the humanity of Jesus. Fully human, we say. One of the tenets of our faith is that when God decided to take on flesh and enter into the human realm, he didn't take any shortcuts. God in the person of Jesus was fully experiencing what it means to be human, even the weaknesses.

And in our story this morning, it is an exhausted Jesus that has arrived in the region of Tyre. He has constantly been on the move, preaching and healing and sparring with the Pharisees. If we look back in the previous chapters of Mark's Gospel, we see Jesus trying to find rest, but he can't get away from the crowds. At one point, he took the disciples out into a desert area hoping to find a space for prayer and respite, but the crowds follow him out there, as well. When he realizes this, he is moved to compassion and he foregoes his rest to care for them. And because they are too far from any town where they might get food, Jesus performs the miracle of feeding the five thousand, because he will not let them go hungry. After feeding them, he again puts his disciples on a boat and retreats to be alone and to pray. But a storm came and he had to help the disciples. Then they arrived in another city and again the people just keep coming having heard the stories of his healing miracles and wanting that healing for themselves or their loved ones. And the Pharisees and scribes keep popping up to challenge him and argue over who he is and his mission.

And so Jesus is tired. He's exhausted. When he finally gets to Tyre, he just wants to rest. He enters a house trying to escape the notice of anyone who might recognize him. But the Syrophenician woman finds him there. The news of Jesus' miracles has spread even to this Gentile region. Her daughter is ill—she has an unclean spirit, the text says—likely meaning she suffered from convulsions. And this mother, like any mother, would do anything to help her daughter. So she finds Jesus, bows down at his feet and begs him to cast the demon out of her daughter. But it seems in that moment that the compassion of Jesus is spent. He has nothing left to give, and he responds to her harshly when he says, "Let the children (meaning the Israelites) be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs (meaning Gentiles like her)."

But like Jacob wrestling the angel for God's blessing, this mother will not let Jesus go until her daughter is healed. She turns his words back on him. "Even the dogs under

the table eat the children's crumbs," she says. With these words, she is calling out his hypocrisy and lack of generosity. She's there because she has heard the stories about Jesus. She knows that he fed five thousand people with a handful of loaves and fishes. She has heard of his sermons about the abundance of God's kingdom. Why should that abundance not extend to her and her daughter simply because they are not Israelites?

The Syrophenician woman calls forth Jesus' humanity, and he realizes that she is right. She is a transformative influence in his story. Until this moment, Jesus believed that he needed to fulfill his mission to the Israelites first, but she speeds up his timeline and speaks to the urgency of reaching those, like herself, who are outsiders. This mother refused to believe that a good and gracious God would not want healing and fulfillment for all people, not just a chosen few.

And if this story began as an illustration of Jesus' humanity—how his exhaustion and frustration were real and caused him to speak to the Syrophenician woman in a terrible and hurtful way, it ends with the promise that generosity is also part of his humanity, as well as ours. Jesus allowed himself to be humbled and transformed by a person that in the eyes of the culture of the time should have had very little value to him. She was a single woman and a Gentile. But her faith and persistence opened his eyes to see that his mission is even bigger than he first imagined, and that God's love and mercy could transcend all of the false boundaries that we humans create.

Maybe it was her faith and persistence that even re-energized the exhausted Jesus who was feeling worn out from his mission.

After all, this transformative encounter led Jesus to take off with his disciples to the Decapolis—another region of Gentiles and outsiders. It was here that he healed the deaf and mute man and preached the Good News to those he had at first believed to be outside God's promise. The Syrophenician woman may not have only pushed him to cross boundaries but given him the strength to do it.

And so we must ask ourselves: What boundaries should we be willing to cross to share God's love and mercy? Who are the outsiders in our lives who deserve our attention, our help and kindness? I know this work of moving outside our comfortable groups of those who look and think and act like we do can be exhausting. It's natural for us to feel tired and frustrated sometimes. But we must always be searching for the Syrophenician woman in our lives. That person who challenges us to see the world differently, with a little more compassion. That person who makes visible those we would rather ignore. Who helps us to see those divides that we need to cross for the cause of spreading God's mercy and love in the world. Only then will we be transformed as Jesus was. May it be so. Amen.