Grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen

The church regularly are upset that Jesus disciples were eating without washing their hands. Jesus tells them it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.

The disciples still don't understand, so Jesus says it more directly. "What a person eats goes into their mouth, then goes into their stomach gets digested and then comes out the other end and goes into the toilet.

What comes out of the mouth is what defiles because what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart and that is where all kinds of bad things come from evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

That makes pretty good sense to me.

Yet, this doesn't seem like the Jesus in Sunday School or Wednesday classes. Jesus is nice, maybe soft spoken right? Jesus never seemed like this kind of potty mouth. What is going on here??

Jesus moves on into foreign territory. A local Canaanite woman came out shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus is often called the Son of David in Matthew's gospel. It is a focus in Matthew's gospel which starts with Jesus' genealogy - tying him to King David.

The Canaanite woman knows who Jesus is. She uses the title of the rightful heir to Israel's throne. Somehow she has heard about Jesus and seems to know who he is and what he can do. So she calls out to him.

Jesus ignores her.

Have you ever been ignored?

Have you ever been ignored when you were in desperate need?

Jesus ignores her.

The disciples did not want her around. They encouraged Jesus to get rid of her, send her away. Jesus seems persuaded. He tells her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We might hear, "You aren't my problem. We don't take your insurance. What we have inside here is only for the gold level members. Go away!"

But, she didn't go away. She knelt down and begged, "Lord, Help me."

Jesus turns her down. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

If we don't try to explain it away, as many past interpretations have, we are forced to be uncomfortable with this cold, mean, insulting Jesus. I don't like it! It isn't nice.

But the woman doesn't give up. She counters his assertion. "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall under the table."

Finally, Jesus says what we have been waiting for, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Now, that's more like it!

But what the heck is going on?

In Bible Study this week Ashley Olson asked a very good question. Where does it change? If Jesus is saying here that he is only sent to the Hebrews and we know that Jesus is going to be for the whole world. Where does it change? I think that change is at the heart of this very story. I think the change, or pivot as I called it, is right here.
Result of a Canaanite outsider who won’t let Jesus go, won’t take no for an answer. Some Bibles title this section The Persistent Canaanite Woman. Yep, she persisted after being ignored. She persisted after being excluded. She continued to persist after being insulted and labeled inferior. And because she persisted, Jesus awakens to the fullness of the ministry ahead of him.

Is it uncomfortable to think of Jesus learning? It is pretty mysterious how this True God and True Man identity worked for Jesus. Did he know all God’s plans from birth, from age 12, a little at a time? Did you ever notice how when Jesus goes off to pray we never get a report of what happened?

Jesus was following Jewish tradition and teaching. I don’t know about the rudeness. Everybody knew the Messiah was coming to save the Jews, he was going to be a Son of David the Hebrew King. The people he grew up with rejected these outsiders who were understood as a threat to their faith and way of life. Why would Jesus have thought any differently?

Matthew carefully labels the woman a Canaanite. That turns out to be significant. What is rather amazing is that in Jesus lineage in Matthew, that same one that traces him to King David, there are three Canaanite women: Rahab - prostitute in Jericho, Tamar - and Ruth. Matthew might be showing us the hidden kinship between Jesus and the Woman. There is a foreshadow of God’s inclusive mission right there in Jesus’ family tree. All of this is leading Matthew 28 and Jesus sending us all to bring the good news to the whole world.

Nobody was nice in this story. Jesus was not nice. The woman did not behave the way a “nice woman” might have been expected to. She bothered people. She asked for help. She argued with the respected leader. So maybe nice is less important than we think.

At the All Women’s Bible Study, the women who did the summer bible study discussed the difference between being nice and being good. They are not the same. We can be nice and smile and nod when someone tells a racist joke. Or, we can be good and tell them we don’t appreciate racist humor.

We can be nice to everyone we encounter, but to be good we may need to give voice to the oppressed, stand up to violent hatred. We may need to make a little noise, write a few letters, engage in non-violent protest. You can’t be nice in the face of the threatened synagogues, attacked mosques, and KKK and Neo-Nazi marches.

As we feel uneasy at Jesus’ original silence we are compelled to examine our own. Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) was a prominent Protestant pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. When he spoke he often shared these words.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Eli Wiesel entered Nazi concentration camps as a teenager. Later he wrote the book, Night and several other books. In 1986 he won the Nobel Peace Prize. He wrote, “What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander.”

Speaking up, being persistent in the face of injustice is not easy. But God’s living word empowers us as it shows us our calling. The Holy Spirit guides us and strengthens us and nudges us past the edges of our comfort zones, but never leaves us. We cannot be silent. We must persist because someone out there desperately needs our help. Have mercy, Lord, Son of David. Give us the words to say, the courage to say them, and the persistence to make them heard. Amen.

**Resources:**
In the Meantime - Dear Partner, Pentecost 11A: The Canaanite Woman, August 14, 2017.