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Limited by Our Own Minds

Rev. Carol Saysette

Editor's note: The following is a simplified summary of Carol's message with edits and additions for ease of reading. ~ Sandra Weil

I enjoyed Dan's sermon last Sunday, especially his sharing about his own spiritual journey. It is a rich and wonderful thing to share one's journey in our spiritual community.

[Here Carol shared the story of her own spiritual journey, beginning with her earliest memory at about 21 months of age, up until the present time. Early in her life she got the message that she was to be a "midwife for souls," which she took to mean that she was to work with people who were dying. She went all the way through seminary planning to be a chaplain because she thought that that was what it meant to be a "midwife for souls." It was only after experiencing the "catch-22" of not getting a job as a chaplain because she wasn't ordained, and the UCC not ordaining unless one had a job offer, that she realized she had to open up to other kinds of ministries. She learned from working at CCC – first as a youth minister and later as co-pastor with Frank Evans – that there are many ways of midwifing souls. After leaving CCC she worked as a spiritual director and a pastoral counselor, and at this point in her life, finds herself asking "now what?"]

[Carol referred to today's scripture reading in her message. Here is the passage.]

Matthew 15:21-28

from *The Five Gospels*, the Jesus Seminar

So Jesus left there, and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And this Canaanite woman from those parts appeared and cried out, "Have mercy on me, sir, you son of David. My daughter is severely possessed." And his disciples came and began to complain: "Get rid of her, because she is badgering us." But in response he said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The woman came and bowed down to him, saying, "Sir, please help me." In response he said, "It is not right to take bread out of children's mouths and throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Of course, sir, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their master's table." Then ... Jesus said to her, "My good woman, your trust is enormous! Your wish is as good as fulfilled." And her daughter was cured at that moment.

This is a very important passage – opening the way for the early church to go beyond being a small Jewish sect. Picture this scene: Jesus was out of his usual setting. He was in the region of Tyre and Sidon. If you imagine this as being a backwater, you're wrong. This was a wealthy shipping and trade area on the sea west of the Galilee, in what is now Syria.... The woman yells at him; he ignores her. She says something sincere in response to Jesus' rather rude response to her about the leftovers for the dogs. Why did he ignore her and then say *that* to her? Perhaps he was in a cultural and racial trap? Maybe he was stuck in his own picture of who he was, and the assignment from God that he carried in his heart. He has a change of heart and heals her daughter. He has compassion for her. He breaks out of his whole upbringing as a Jew, and heals her daughter.

Take a leap here into Buddhism. Years ago, I took classes here with Yvonne Rand. We have two ongoing groups here. Many CCCers have enjoyed and benefitted from what they have learned from Buddhist teachers. I don't see the teachings of Jesus and those of Buddha in conflict. In fact, I see them enriching one another; so does Thich Naht Hahn, who in today's Food for Thought says:

To me, mindfulness is very much like the Holy Spirit. Both are agents of healing. When you have mindfulness, you have love and understanding, you see more deeply, and you can heal the wounds in your own mind. The Buddha was called the King of Healers. In the Bible, when someone touches Christ, he or she is healed.... Jesus healed whatever He touched. With the Holy Spirit in Him, His power as a healer transformed many people. All schools of Christianity agree on this.... I feel that all of us also have the seed of the Holy Spirit in us, the capacity of healing, transforming, and loving. When we touch that seed, we are able to touch God the Father and God the Son.

from *Living Buddha, Living Christ*

As it applies to the story of the Canannite woman, the first step of the eightfold path is *right understanding* or *right view*: seeing the world and everything in it as it really is, and not as we believe it to be or want it to be. Jesus had a wakeup call from the Canaanite woman. She was a soul in need, and a pretty perceptive one at that. Her daughter needed healing.

The second step is having *right intent*. Right intent urges us to decide what our heart wants. (As Dan shared last week, scientists are finding the heart has its own brain. Christianity is heart-centered.) In this story, Jesus' heart opened.

The third step is *right speech*. At first Jesus is stuck in his old belief that his ministry is limited to serving his own people. Perhaps he was prejudiced, as so many in our own country are prejudiced against those who are not exactly like themselves. When Jesus woke up in this story, his heart opened and he perceived the woman at a soul level. He really saw her, and saw her heart. He saw her faith, and her desperation.

I could go through all the steps of the Eightfold Path and see it operating in this story of Jesus (but for the sake of time, I won't do that now).

When I Googled "Buddhism" for this sermon, up came the *Four Noble Truths*. These truths refer to and express the basic orientation of Buddhism in a short expression: *We crave and cling to impermanent states and things which are dukkha, "incapable of satisfying and painful."*

Jesus let go of clinging to his limited upbringing in Judaism, and saw a larger view. My question to you is: What are you clinging to that is keeping you stuck? What belief do you have about yourself that is outdated for your life now? Take a moment to think about some of the possible themes of the story.

Amen.