

**“5,849 Gifts”**  
April 30, 2023  
Rev. Ann Eichhorn

**Readings**

Matthew: 15:22-23, 25-28

A Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying after us.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

May You Know Love  
Beth Richardson

Today, may you know love.  
May you know happiness.  
May you know peace.  
Today, may you be open.  
May you be safe.  
May you be blessed.  
Today, may you feel uplifted.  
May you feel serene.  
May you feel joy.  
A thousand, thousand prayers,  
A thousand, thousand blessings,  
On you, and you, and you.



*Time to Wake Up*  
Charles Burton Barber

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Writing a sermon is still an interesting process for me in that most often it pushes me to sit down at the computer and ponder a bunch of things I have been thinking about as they relate to my faith – sort of like putting puzzle pieces together. This morning’s sermon was no exception. As I begin my message this morning, I want to credit Scott DeTurk for his incredibly insightful song, “I Woke Up” which he recently wrote and which you will hear today. I also want to give credit to Rev. Cameron Trimble, the director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, for steering me in the direction of the Matthew text as one of the readings for today. The reading appears in one of the meditations in her book *Searching for the Sacred*;

she called the meditation “the gift of being seen.” It seems to me that both Scott’s song and the reading have some contemporary significance which I’d like to explore. I also need to say that in regard to the way one of our political parties and the religious right have defined and demeaned the word “woke,” I suspect that they are talking about *me*, and are attempting to attach a negative label to aspects of the faith I hold dear.

I’ll start with a little historical unpacking of the gospel story of Jesus and a Canaanite woman whose daughter was ill. As a Canaanite, the woman was considered an enemy of the Jewish people. Canaanites were the dominant people who first occupied and controlled the trade centers in what is now Israel. The Canaanites were seen as unclean people, foreigners who worshipped a goddess and her consort and various idols. They practiced human sacrifice, were a different color, and wore different kinds and colors of clothing. They were a largely urban people made up of several ethnic groups. To the Jews they were “outsiders.” There were many wars between the Jews and the Canaanites. Here’s the text again:

A Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying after us.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

This text makes clear the racism, sexism, xenophobia, and the traditional system of rigid social stratification (caste system) which in ancient times ranked groups according to their ancestral descent, their occupations, and their genders. It also reveals that Jesus had a few blind spots he had to face when he was encountered with the woman’s requests for healing and acceptance. What this text also shows is that Jesus’ disciples (and Jesus himself) were born privileged by virtue of being men, i.e., they were born into a society of unequals. (This is still the case today to some extent.) They looked down on the woman and her laments. They basically wanted Jesus to get rid of her quickly, as she was bothering them. They felt that she didn’t deserve even to be heard. Like now, these men didn’t recognize their positions of power; it was “just the way it was.”

One part of this story that I feel is especially sad is the societal position the woman quickly went to after the response of this powerful man, Jesus, to her plea for help – not for herself, but for her daughter. She put herself below an animal, a dog, in her request to be fed nourishment and compassion, to be seen as a human in dire need. But the good news in this text is that Jesus finally saw her for who she was, a woman with an openness to a God-centered faith who believed her child could be healed, and who had the courage to ask for Jesus’ assistance. He responded; he WOKE UP! Hopefully, this act had an impact on the disciples, although we don’t have a specific text that speaks further about this encounter. There are other similar texts about this same kind of blind spot or bias that Jesus had, which he had to shed as he met and began to deal with others unlike himself and with their human stories and needs. The encounter with the woman at the well is another example.

What this text says to me is that Jesus wasn't perfect. He was like us: a human working to rid himself and others of the biases and emotions that separate us from one another, the hatred that divides us, the ignorance that overpowers common sense, and the daily practices and labels that keep us from seeing others as our equals. He was learning that these ways of treating one another can fester and reduce the possibility of even trying to develop peaceful, loving, compassionate relationships with each other. Here I will leave the historical past and go back to the title I put on this message today, "5,840 gifts."

We have 5,840 hours of awake time in a year (24 hours a day minus 8 hours of sleep every night). We could call these 5,840 hours "woke" time. Time, as you know, is one of our most important gifts from God. We all have established rhythms to our days: we get up, get dressed, eat breakfast, read the paper, go for a walk, exercise, etc. But what I want to focus on is how we think and what we choose (consciously or not) to spend our gifts of time on. I go back to another reflection from Rev. Trimble, "Doing Meaningful Work:"

According to the U.S. Labor Department's job openings and labor turnover summary, 38 million people in the U.S. quit their jobs in 2021. That represents more resignations than any previous time in their 20 years of recording. This trend is often referred to as "the Great Resignation." Looking for answers to this reality, it was pointed out that people delayed normal job transitions because of the uncertainty created during the pandemic. Others discovered they want to do different kinds of work or work in different ways. These facts indicated a significant shift, noted as these days of deep disruption have become the birthing space for a new human dream – a dream of a world where we can earn a living while also living a balanced, awakened life.

In her book *Working Ourselves to Death*, Author Diane Fassel observes that because work addiction keeps us busy, we stay estranged from our essential selves. An aspect of that estrangement is that we cease asking ourselves if we are doing our right work, performing tasks or pursuing vocations (and I would add retirements) that are good for us, for our families, and the universe. As many of us here at CCC are retired or are approaching retirement, our question is often about how to use the gift of time in ways other than work or in wasteful pursuits.

In another of her reflections, Rev. Trimble uses a text from Habakkuk 2:2, the biblical book Bill introduced to you last week. The text reads "Then the Lord answered me and said: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.'" She began this reflection with the information that in 1889, the Commissioner of the U.S. Patent Office in issuing the 500<sup>th</sup> patent, predicted that the patent office would soon shrink in size and eventually close. According to his assessment, "Everything that can be invented has been invented." Today, however, that office has issued well over ten million patents, and I know that my son-in-law has submitted requests for several more just since the beginning of this year. Trimble notes

Being able to sense the future is a valuable leadership skill, but what assumptions do we make about our futures that could be ... far off base and limited in scale? How are we holding ourselves back because we have a narrow view of a possible world?

She points out that it took 155 years for the U.S. to issue its first 5 million patents. It took just 27 years to issue the next 5 million! Contemporary philosopher Jean Houston has reflected:

The ancient curse, “may you live in interesting times” has come true for us in that this is the most interesting time in human history. You and I are living 10-100 times the life experiences of our ancestors just one or two generations before. Every day our lives reflect a quantum leap in complexity, innovation, and experience. So, what shall we do with these moments of opportunity?

Houston goes on to observe that the essential work is to expand our vision, our consciousness, of ourselves and our world. In the face of great change, we need great visions, and we need to write them down.

Along with adjusting to enormous shifts in work patterns, we are also having to learn to value equally work and volunteer time, and work being done from home rather than in an office. We need not only to reshape our identities and job descriptions, but to make plans for the future that will benefit the majority, not just the select few. We need to make changes that bring greater balance to our lives. Fast-moving innovations are pushing long-time institutions to reexamine how best to use both human and financial resources. People in general want more time with their loved ones, families and friends; they want to continue to grow their own knowledge base, expand their resources to cover more of their everyday needs, to be healthy, and to find more ways to live lives of peace and love. This is where our faith and spiritual practices can help inform decisions we make about how we use our gifts of time. It is clear that self-care is important, for as we care for ourselves, we practice using some of the tools we can use to care for others. When we make use of our creativity, our imaginations, and our financial resources, apply a little elbow grease, and make the efforts to develop deep relationships with one another, fantastic results emerge!

We have 5,840 waking or “woke” hours in a year! May we be blessed as in Beth Richardson’s poem by spending our time as she suggests:

Today, may you know love.  
May you know happiness.  
May you know peace.  
Today, may you be open.  
May you be safe.  
May you be blessed.  
Today, may you feel uplifted.  
May you feel serene.  
May you feel joy.  
A thousand, thousand prayers,  
A thousand, thousand blessings,  
On you, and you, and you.

Amen