

Early last week, there was a Census event in the marina parking lot which I can see from my house. I didn't go to the event, but I saw the results when I came home in the late afternoon— brightly covered chalk drawings all over the sidewalks with the words Census prominently displayed. Have you filled out your census form yet? Anyway, as I looked out, I saw two teenagers go by on their bicycles. They stopped and started spray painting over the chalk drawings. Unbelievable I thought. Messing up the chalk drawings with spray paint and while it was still light out. I pulled down my kitchen window about to yell at them, but thought better of it because what would stop them from spray painting my house. I instead took several pictures in case the police needed them later. I did think it was odd that other people walking by said nothing to them. They left and left their cans behind. I wondered - why did they leave them behind? Then it dawned on me – were those cans left over from the chalk drawing Census event? Was there such a thing as spray-on chalk? Turns out there is. Those young men were just joining in on the decorating. Boy was I glad I had not yelled out the window and accused them of defacing the sidewalk. I had it wrong and thank goodness I kept my mouth shut.

Jesus did not have that luxury in this morning's gospel. He opened his mouth. Jesus and his disciples while travelling through a foreign country and a woman approaches him asking for healing for her daughter. Jesus outright ignores her, but the woman is persistent and keeps on yelling out so much so that the disciples ask Jesus to send her away. Jesus tells the woman that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She kneels before him and pleads with him "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Ow! Did Jesus just compare her to a dog?

The woman is not phased and said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." And Jesus finally gets it – he gets that the message he brings, the healing he gives is for all and says "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. Even though those words came out of his mouth telling the woman that what he brings was not for her, he ends up changing and healing her daughter.

It is a great example for us. If Jesus can change then so can we. If Jesus did not let the words he said get in the way, then we can do the same. Jesus overcoming the conscious and unconscious biases, prejudices, and entitlements of his culture shows us that we can too.

It is a strange passage for us to hear because we are accustomed to a Jesus who stands up for those on the outside. As Debie Thomas¹ describes it as Jesus's boundary-breaking, taboo-busting, division-destroying ministry of table fellowship. After all, he's the Messiah who eats with tax collectors and prostitutes. He's the rabbi who

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2716-is-it-good-news-yet>

breaks bread with sinners. His disciples are the ones who earn the Pharisees' contempt for eating with unwashed hands."

And yet, in this gospel we see Jesus getting the situation wrong, but then expanding his view. We see him coming to terms with the understanding that the Good News that he brings is not just for the children of Israel but for all. Just as Jesus shows how to pray and how to care for the least of these, Jesus shows us how to expand our views, our boundaries and our definitions of God's kingdom – even if we have declared out loud that we were in a different place.

Think back on your life on those times when God has expanded your views, when God has invited you to include those you have been leaving out. For me, I think about a time which is very hard for me to talk about, because I am ashamed that I ever thought that way. It was before I went to seminary. The clergy at the church I was attending began to talk about Latino ministry. I was on vestry so I was part of the conversations. We were a bustling growing church in the late 90's getting ready to add a third service and had lots and lots of children in Sunday School. I thought why are we working on ministry for Spanish speaking people? Aren't they all Roman Catholic? They can go to that big Catholic church right across the street. I can't remember if I said those words out loud, but I may well have.

Over time I changed and became very passionate about Latino ministry and the need for the Episcopal Church to welcome the Spanish speaking community. What changed? I began by listening to the clergy and other leaders in my faith community. I trusted them and if they said a ministry was important, I listened. I still wasn't 100% on board but then I went to seminary and experienced a joint seminar with Black and Latino seminarians That experience got me intrigued and interested in Latino ministry. I grew from there and give thanks that I was open to the movement of the Spirit for that change to happen.

Jesus was open to change. Sure it took a whole lot of persistence on the part of the woman begging for healing of her child, but he heard her and declared that she had great faith. Are we being open to that change that expansion of boundaries that God moves us towards – that movement to include the other, the one no one sees, the one who has not voice, who is suffering, who is hungry, who speaks a different language or who worships differently. There is much to get in the way of us seeing each other as the family of God. COVID-19 has given us many opportunities to expand our boundaries and many of us have changed. We are worshipping differently. We are seeing how deeply racism is still present in our country. We are more aware of how big the divide is between the rich and the poor.

Where in your life is that persistent voice calling you to change? How is the Spirit expanding your boundaries? Don't let what you have said out loud or thought get in the way. See how God is breaking open your heart and go forth to have God's inclusive kingdom break forth in this world.