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# The Day That Jesus Got Healed

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The New Testament is full of healing narratives. From people who could not see, hear, or walk to those dealing with bleeding, withered hands, stricken with leprosy, or oppressed by demons. All were brought into the doctor's office to be made new. Each was deemed worthy to receive the healing that only Jesus can bring.

But what happens when the nurse or the doctor gets sick? What happens when the anesthesiologist needs to be put under? What happens when the GYN is hemorrhaging or finds a lump in her breast? What do we do when the urologist's PSAs are too high? What do we do when the oncologist is diagnosed with lung cancer, the dentist has an abscess, or the orthopedic has a fractured fibula?

I hear your thoughts swarming, this text is about the healing of a woman's daughter who was oppressed by a demon. Yes, a little girl was healed in this text. But I submit to you that this text is about that and so much more. On that day, in this text, another healing took place.

Jesus was sick, y'all. He was infirmed by his Jewish male bias. Jesus was sick. He was ill from his tradition and ideology of racial priority. Jesus was sick. He picked up the broken pieces of his ancestors' hatred of the Canaanites. Jesus was sick. His people drank the juice of the empire and passed the cup to him. I'm talking about those environmental factors and influences that swarmed all around Jesus. From synagogues to weddings, festivals to feasts, from his mama's table to his daddy's shop. These biases, this sense of superiority, this patriarchal privilege, this cultural arrogance, this religious pre-eminence, this national supremacy was passed on to Jesus, just like your embedded theology was given to you. In too many cases, not as a gift, but as a toxic predisposition that could eventually make you sick.

After Jesus tussled with the Pharisees about who was clean and unclean, Jesus shows us what can happen after the sermon ends. Jesus went to Tyre and secretly entered a house, or so he thought. A woman approached him about her daughter who was suffering from demon possession. She falls at the feet of Jesus and begs him to heal her. Jesus replies in verse 27, "and He was saying to

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her, 'Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'<sup>1</sup> Wait, excuse me? Who is talking? Is this Jesus? Is this the one that John describes as righteous, pure, humble, and loving? Is this the same Jesus that Luke calls kind and forgiving? Is this the Jesus that Paul exalts as generous and compassionate? I just want to know if this is the same Jesus. If this is the same Jesus, why is he comparing this woman to a dog? Why does she even have to beg?

This woman is called a Greek in the book of Mark. Anciently, the country including Tyre and Sidon, was called Phoenicia, or Syro-Phoenicia. It was taken by the Greeks under Alexander the Great's rule. She therefore was a Gentile, living under the Greek government. The Phoenicians descended from the Canaanites--bitter enemies of Israel. The Jews also considered themselves as the chosen children of God and other nations were spoken of with terms of contempt, like dogs. Lastly, you know that Jewish men had a low regard for women. I wonder, was Jesus' statement about her race, nationality, gender, ancestry, or religion? Many womanist and feminist scholars argue that his reply was about all

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1. Mark 7:27 (NASB).

of it. No matter motive, this woman asked Jesus for help, and he responded with a slur. Jesus called her a dog. Yes, Jesus was sick!

Before you get on the witness stand and defend Jesus, the cloud of white male scholars has already done it. They say that:

1. It was a trial of her faith. Jesus wanted to see how badly she wanted her child healed. But did Jesus ask Simon's mother-in-law how badly she wanted her fever gone in Mark 1?
2. Jesus was tired and needed privacy. They argue that she forced herself on Jesus when he needed rest. Since when does having our expectations shattered justify meanness or rudeness?
3. Jesus wanted to honor the law which ruled his mission. They argue that Jesus was called to the Jews first. But, why the name-calling? Why play into generations of slurring Canaanites? Hey, Jesus, if it is true that you can't help anyone but Jews, why did you offer to heal the centurion's servant in Matthew? Even if this request seemed out of season, Jesus could have responded as he did to his mother at the wedding in Cana, "what business do you have with Me, woman? My hour has not yet come."<sup>2</sup> In that case, he still graciously helped many by turning water into wine. Despite the timing, Jesus did it anyway. No slur. No name-calling. No diminishing. He did what Mary asked, even before the appointed time.
4. It wasn't a slur because Jesus used the Greek word for a puppy or household dog and not a scavenger or street dog. Dr. Mitzi Smith says in her book, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back* "the woman is likened to the 'dogs' that have no place at the table. Generally, ancient Semitic peoples did not care for dogs as household pets."<sup>3</sup> The Syrophenician woman was deemed impure and subordinate, and Jesus called her such. Her status justified his denial of her request for help.

Jesus was fully human and fully divine. And in his humanity, he spoke the language of empire. He spoke what Walter Bruggeman coined the language of "royal consciousness."<sup>4</sup> He spoke the language of colonized Jewish men who had been taught to despise women, to despise Canaanites, to despise Greeks, to despise Gentiles, to despise unclean individuals. Jesus was sick.

What about Hebrews 4? I'm so glad you brought it up. Let's go by there. Verse 14, "therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet

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**T**his text suggests that Jesus was tempted by the biases and isms of his day, just like you are tempted by patriarchy, racism and classism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and xenophobia, but Jesus worked through it. You, too, can work through it.

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he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Angela Parker asked the Biblical Theological Foundations class at McAfee School of Theology a poignant question: When did Jesus move from being our example to being our exalted? Jesus is the example we need in this interaction. This text suggests that Jesus was tempted by the biases and isms of his day, just like you are tempted by patriarchy, racism and classism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and xenophobia, but Jesus worked through it. You, too, can work through it.

Yes, Hebrews 4 says that Jesus did not sin. The Greek word for sin here is "hamartia." It means to miss the mark, to have an ethical failure, violation of divine law, by omission or commission. When you get deeper into the Greek you will see that sin is self-oriented. I'd like to suggest a possibility of how Mark 7 and Hebrews 4 can be read together. Jesus' expression toward this woman was not from within, but instead from without. It reflects the thoughts, feelings, and bias of the community. When the Syrophenician woman asked for help, Jesus simply repeated what he'd always heard. Your sin is not what you are born into. Your sin is not being handed a problematic theology. The sin comes when your embedded theology is opposed, and you choose to hold onto it. When someone confronts your distorted view of black and brown people, challenges your subordination of women, bumps up against your "othering" of foreigners, counters your welfare queen narrative, raises your awareness about ageism, classism, ableism, or xenophobia and you choose NOT to develop a more loving, more just, more godly deliberative theology. When you choose to remain spiteful, mean, hateful, and oppressive -- that is the sin.

In our text, this woman challenged Jesus in verse 28, with "yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."<sup>6</sup> Jesus chose to accept the challenge and wrestle with his embedded stuff between verses 28 and 29. In the white space between the verses, Jesus thinks things over. He pauses to reflect. When this woman pushed back on Jesus with what Mitzi Smith calls "womanist sass." With her talk back. With the audacity to

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2. John 2:4 (NASB).

3. Francis D. Lanzenby, "Greek and Roman Household Pets," in *The Classical Journal* (Vol. 44, No. 4, 1949), 246 quoted in Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 37.

4. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

5. Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV).

6. Mark 7:28 (NASB).

see herself and her child as more than a stereotype, more than a caricature, and more than a trope. When she decided to see herself as human, made in the image and likeness of God, fearfully and wonderfully; inherently good. She acted womanish and said, “I am a woman, phenomenally, phenomenal woman that’s me.”<sup>7</sup> In response, Jesus pivoted. He turned and went in a different direction. He turned away from his colonized, racialized, labeling of her and he changed his mind and his heart. Jesus responded in verse 29, because of this word, because of your logos, because you spoke the word of God to me, “Go your way! The demon has left your daughter.”<sup>8</sup>

This Jesus is my Jesus. This Jesus shows me how to face my humanity. He shows me how to face the mess I’ve been taught. Face my privilege. Face my bias, even as a double minority, and come out of it. To come out of it more alive. To come out of it more whole. To come out more faithfully human. To come out more loving. This Jesus shows me how to get healed, set free, delivered, and liberated from the structures of oppression that threaten to tantalize the oppressed into acting like oppressors. This Jesus not only healed this woman’s daughter, but went on touching unclean people, welcoming children, and fellowshiping with women. After that day, not another slur was spoken by Jesus against a Gentile. Yes, this is my Jesus!

If you want to be a better human, follow this Jesus out. If you want to rid yourself of all your embedded stuff, follow this Jesus out. If you want to be more loving, accept the sass, and talk-back, and follow this Jesus out. Come on, my sisters and brothers, follow this Jesus toward your healing and wholeness. Because if you let your bias and problematic inherited beliefs go, you too can be made well!

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Jesus thinks things over. He pauses to reflect. When this woman pushed back on Jesus with what Mitzi Smith calls “womanist sass.” With her talk back. With the audacity to see herself and her child as more than a stereotype, more than a caricature, and more than a trope. ... This Jesus shows me how to get healed, set free, delivered, and liberated from the structures of oppression that threaten to tantalize the oppressed into acting like oppressors. This Jesus not only healed this woman’s daughter, but went on touching unclean people, welcoming children, and fellowshiping with women.

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7. Maya Angelou, “Phenomenal Woman” in *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House Inc., 1994).

8. Mark 7:29 (NIV).