

“Keep Shouting”
11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2020
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Romans 11: 1-2, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

Poem: “*A Strong Woman*” by motherhood.org

A Strong Woman is one who feels deeply and loves fiercely
Her tears flow just as abundantly as her laughter.
A Strong Woman is both soft and powerful
She is both practical and spiritual.
A Strong Woman in her essence is a gift to the world.

I would like to begin this morning with a story about a woman in a farming community years ago who went to a meeting usually dominated by men. They were discussing some important issues critical to farmers. About midway through the meeting this woman stood up and spoke her piece. One of the old farmers didn't like her intrusion. He jumped to his feet and said, “What does she know about anything. I would like to ask her if she knows how many toes a pig has.”

Quick as a flash, the woman replied, “Take off your boots, Fred, and count them yourself!”

For me, this is an example when strong-willed women have something to say – it is best to keep quiet and listen. These strong women have a voice and they *will* be heard!

I would like to go back a few Sundays from the Gospel of Matthew. Earlier we read about the feeding of the five-thousand, but when you actually read the text, the number just doesn't add up – it is more like fifteen thousand+ when we add in the

women and children. The disciples seemed to be dismissive and wanted Jesus to send them away into the villages so that they can buy themselves some food. Jesus uses this moment to teach them and us – that no one, should ever be sent away hungry – both physically and spiritually. “You! You disciples, you give them something to eat.” “You! You Church, you give them something to eat!”

In last week’s Gospel reading from Matthew, once the crowd at this huge dinner party of Jesus had their bellies filled with bread and fish and their souls filled with the Word of God – Jesus dismisses them and his disciples so that he could go up for some time of rest and prayer.

In today’s Gospel reading, we have Jesus and his disciples once again on the move. After some time of self-care and teaching the Peter about his lack of faith out in the water and how we too are reminded to reach out to Jesus when we find ourselves knee deep in the mud pits of life – today we get another lesson, not only from Jesus, but from a strong-willed woman.

Matthew reminds us that she is not a Jew, she is a woman, and recalling that Jews and Canaanites were not the best of friends at that time. Canaanites could be Palestinian in our world today. Still considered as outsiders, still “othered” by many in that area and still not the best of friends.

We do not know the woman’s name, nor her daughter’s name, but many of us can surely relate to the desperation of the mother’s shouting. At a time when we see our beloveds – family, daughter, sons, grandmothers, grandfathers, friends, colleagues, best friends – fighting this COVID19 virus or dying from it – we can relate to why she is persistent in her shouting – Amen! The most vital identity about this woman is – **she is a mother!** She is a strong-willed woman and mother who *will* be heard! “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” Here is what is interesting – she shouts out to Jesus by using his family

linage – a Canaanite woman – the other, the outsider – first begging for mercy, then calling out to the Son of David. I know you and I know your name – you Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God through the family linage of David, your family history has been foretold through the Jewish prophets that I, and so many like me have heard from outside of the temple palace walls. You, Jesus, Son of David, the compassionate healer of God, have mercy on me and save my daughter!

Beloved community, at a time when we are shouting for lives of our loved ones to be healed by this unsee-able virus, **this unnamed woman reminds us to be persistent in our prayers and persistent in our shouting.**

Jesus' response would make it seem as if he had left his compassion up at mountain where he prayed. It would seem as if he too now followed his disciples stance on being dismissive. At first, Jesus' response is no response. Not a word, not a "how are you" not a "I do not have time for this woman" – nothing, nada. Now we do not know what demon possessed her daughter – we may not know what it really meant to be "possessed" in those days. For some of us today, many think their teenagers are possessed in some way...I'm kidding! But in all seriousness – the burdens our society and families place on the backs of our youth and young adults to a point where it may feel like a heavy burden. In this time of having to remain sheltered in place, many of our youth may be experiencing depression, anxiety, or becoming irritable. Many of our youth have been brought up to be sociable beings and so school has become a place where they can be youth, students, a place where they can socialize with their peers away from adults. We are meant to be "in community" so it has become difficult to be locked in place for a prolonged period of time – with parents. This is a time when they might be shouting like our Canaanite sister – "Have mercy of me, Lord, Son of David!"

The more we read the Gospels a common theme emerges – Jesus is always up to some, as the late Congressman John Lewis would say – “good trouble” – Amen! Jesus is always trying to find teachable moments for his disciples, followers, and listeners. Today’s reading reminds me of some of the strong-willed women in scripture – like the woman who gave all she had as an offering – a teachable moment that Jesus used. The woman at the well – another Canaanite sister – another teachable moment that Jesus used. The first evangelists and Gospel authors of the resurrected Christ – Women! You! You strong woman of the Gospels, go and be teachers and preachers, even if you have to “shout” along the way!

Once again, his disciples this morning were their usual dismissive mode, and it was easy to do with a Canaanite and a woman. “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” This woman is bringing shame onto them with all this shouting so, “Jesus, please send her away, she’s disturbing my soul from the inside with all this shouting! She’s making me feel guilty – send her away!”

This is not the first time that Jesus refers to the house of Israel as “lost sheep.” Earlier in chapter 10 of Matthew, he also tells the disciples to enter only into the houses of the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Notice how Jesus does not refer to the Canaanite Woman as being “lost” as he does to those within the house of Israel. Beloved community, I believe Jesus is teaching his disciples once again, and us, that before we begin with our finger pointing toward anyone else or any group, maybe we should think about cleaning up our own house first! We need to clean up the sheep in our own house filled with racism, sexism, ageism, misogyny and all the other ugly and hurtful “isms” and hurtful words that is embedded in our society. When our own house, weather that be our House Churches of today, our places of Worship, however we may want to describe “house,” or even our national leaders would refer to another human being as “pig” or “dog” or “nasty woman” or “spic” in my case or any other

hurtful word. That is the house Jesus is asking us to clean up first. When our house would have the poor on our streets and in our society eat the crumbs off sidewalks and floors – we must keep shouting until change happens. Like all the “*woman of great faith*,” until change happens and until prayers are answered, we must keep shouting!

Many of us have had a similar experience in our lives with strong women – Amen! Iao Church knows how I like to talk about some of my Mama’s stories. You see, Mama was a strong-willed, Catholic, Latina woman who crossed the boundaries and lines of the higher-archaeal, patriarchal system of oppression. She learned from her Mama, another strong willed, devoted Catholic woman who believed in not only her worth, but in the worth of all women and all men. Mama not only prayed to Father God, but as a strong-willed woman, she also prayed to Mary, the mother of Jesus – the co-creator with God. Mama prayed the rosary daily. La Virgen de Guadalupe was looked upon by Mama and many in her generation as an example to follow when it came to courage, strength and faith. Like the woman who kept shouting at Jesus, these women who helped form my theology were instrumental in keeping male privilege in check. Mama believed that her children would learn to cook, clean, iron and sew, not because it is a man’s or woman’s job, but because it is the right thing to do and teach. Here in Hawaii, we call that “pono” – which means “do what is right.”

So, let us close with this beloved community. At a time when we find ourselves knee deep in the mud pits of life. When things are not going quite right. When we are worried about putting food on the table, worried about ourselves, our health and wellbeing or maybe a loved one suffering from the COVID19 virus. Maybe worried about our brothers and sisters in the black or Asian community who are purposely being targeted by hate. Let us take a stance like the strong-willed woman in our

Gospel reading this morning. We will be heard – Amen? We will keep shouting until we are heard. For ALL voices matter – because we all “feel deeply and love fiercely.”

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.