

LOCKDOWN DAY 144 – 17 AUGUST 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Matthew 15:10-28

Hymn: *New every morning is the love*

In South Africa, today is the last day of Lockdown level 3. As from midnight we are in Lockdown level 2. There are still restrictions placed on us. It has been a long and difficult time for us who have longed for the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. The Statement that I issued to the Diocese on Friday, still stands. Please note that we are working hard towards opening in September and not immediately or any time in August. Once we have received the Government Gazette directives, I will write to you again.

As we enter this new week and risk adjustment level 2, may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all for ever.

The story of a Canaanite woman's encounter with Jesus is not a comfortable one to hear, nor an easy one to understand. It seems out of character for Jesus to reject a distressed woman seeking healing for her child. It is unlike him to use such dismissive words to someone, humiliating someone in the presence of others.

It might help us in our understanding of it to set this story in context and look at the events which lead up to it.

At the beginning of Chapter 15, Matthew tells us that Pharisees and scribes come from Jerusalem to question Jesus. We can be sure these questions are not asked with minds open to a new understanding and deepening of faith. They are challenges thrown at Jesus in order to discredit and condemn him. They ask why Jesus' disciples don't follow the traditional Jewish rituals of hand-washing?

Jesus doesn't answer their question. Instead he launches a ferocious attack on the way they themselves use traditions to undermine the spirit of God's law. He calls them hypocrites – people who give the appearance of worshipping and honouring God but who in fact put their own interests first, harming others in the process.

These Pharisees, then accuse Jesus of breaking tradition while Jesus insists that in fact, he is the one calling people to live according to God's laws, not human distortions of it.

After this encounter with his critics Jesus talks to his followers about what makes someone clean or unclean. He explains the teaching in more detail to his disciples who (not for the first time) haven't understood him. Jesus says that food we eat is processed and passes out of the body. It's a physical function having no moral implications.

However, the way we speak and act does have moral implications affecting ourselves and other people. Our words and deeds can be said to be unclean but they come from our hearts, not from our bodies and diets or the way we eat.

It is after this teaching that Jesus goes to the district of Tyre and Sidon where the Canaanite woman comes to him to beg him to heal her sick daughter.

The gospel reading has a very important message for all of us to understand. The lady who comes forward to Jesus to ask him to cure her daughter is a Samaritan woman. At first Jesus ignores her. Perhaps he is struggling within himself how to respond. His compassion and love for all suffering people would move him to respond with healing. But he is also aware of his calling as God's Chosen One from and for God's chosen people. The woman continues her cries for help and the disciples suggest that the best way to silence her would be to grant her request. Perhaps still partly talking to himself and perhaps in a questioning way Jesus says, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Now the woman

comes right up to him, kneels in front of him and again asks for help. Beloved of God, we are never taller than when we kneel before Jesus

Between the Jews and the Samaritans there was strong hatred and yet this woman comes forward to Jesus asking Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus knows that his critics would reject this woman and would consider Jesus unclean for having spoken to her. He voices their thoughts, saying *"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

Her quick, witty retort that even the dogs eat what the children don't want releases the tension and we can perhaps imagine Jesus' smile and delight in finding such faith in an "outsider" when it has been missing among "the chosen people". His love and compassion flow freely once more and the daughter is healed. The words and actions of Jesus are loving and healing, reflecting God's gracious acceptance of all people.

She calls him the Son of David. She acknowledges that he is the expected One, the Anointed One, the One whom God was to send into this world to redeem us and to save us. So really, this lady is a symbol for the entire world to acknowledge Jesus first as Lord, as Messiah. When Jesus sees that faith in the human heart, Jesus can heal the sins so prevalent in our lives, he can heal our memories, he can heal us from everything that defiles the sanctuary of our souls. She acknowledges that she is not even worthy to sit at the same table, only to eat the crumbs falling from the Master's table just like the dogs do. This lady reveals the mystery of Spirituality. When we acknowledge our nothingness, God fills us, no longer with scraps but with the food of eternal life of his presence, when we gather as his adopted children around the table of the Lord.

This whole chapter presents us with challenges about how we live out our faith in our homes, congregations, communities, learning institutions and places of work.

We are powerfully reminded that we can say and do all the right things but it's what going on in our hearts that matters and what is going on in our hearts will always somehow be shown in our lives and relationships. We are reminded that God looks to the very centre of our being but does so with love and compassion, always wanting to forgive and heal so that we can live lives free from guilt and able to love others as we have been loved.

Finally, we are reminded that we too, are called to love beyond all boundaries, ignoring prejudices because no one is ever outside the reach of God's love – which is for all people everywhere and always.

Today please reach out to any person who you know is feeling powerless due to Gender Based Violence or lack of Compassion.

Prayers:

In our prayers, we remember the survivors and bereaved of the Marikana massacre of 8 years ago, many who are still struggling and seeking closure and healing. We pray for our country as we enter level 2 of Covid 19 lockdown. That all the plans and programmes to unlock the economy and reopen our church doors, may work for the progress and development of all peoples. We pray for ourselves that we may continue to be persevering and persistent as we present our needs in prayer. We pray for those searching for God, that they may be comforted by the fact that God is constantly searching for them. We pray for the faithful departed, that they may have the joy of seeing God face to face. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. **Amen**

I am, Because We Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's World. *New every morning is the love.*