

“Shock and Awe”
Mark 7:24-37
Sunday, September 6, 2015
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

It seems a man was headed up to bed one night, when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in their shed. She told him she could see it from the bedroom window. He told her he hadn't been in the shed that day. When he looked out the window, he saw that there were people in the shed, stealing things.

So, he phoned the police. The police told him that there was no one was in his area and consequently, there was no one available to catch the thieves.

He said “OK,” hung up, counted to 30 and called the police again.

And he said, “Hello. I just called a few seconds ago, because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now. I've just shot them all.”

Within five minutes there were half a dozen police cars in the area, an armed response unit. They caught the burglars red-handed.

One of the policemen said to the man, “I thought you said you'd shot them!”

And he replied, “I thought you said there was no one available.”

Given the recent violence in the news, I hope you'll forgive me for telling this story.

Then again, when is there a day without violence in the news? It's an attention-getter. It shocks us into taking notice.

Jesus gets my attention this morning. I sit up and take notice. His behavior shocks me.

I. Shock (vv. 24-30).

If we want a well-behaved leader, Christianity may not be the faith for us. Jesus is

downright rude, most of the time!

Some current, very popular pastors use rude language in the pulpit. I'm from an older – gosh, that hurts to say! – more traditional church culture, in which we don't use curse words in church. In fact, we try to remove curse words from our language altogether. Christians just don't talk that way!

But here we have Jesus – we could argue that whatever he says is even older and more traditional – so here we have our Lord and Savior referring to the Gentile woman as a female dog! I'm not going to say the ruder term out loud; you can use your imaginations.

I'm sorry, but I'm a bit disappointed in Jesus. I'm a bit offended. In fact, I'm shocked. It's like when I go to a movie and hear foul language on the lips of a favorite actor.

Why does Jesus use such rude language? Why does he dismiss the Gentile woman, calling her a female dog unfit for table company?

Scholars note that she is a woman; culture dictates that a man address Jesus, and not a woman. Scholars also note that at this time there is a political imbalance between the wealthy Gentiles of Tyre and the Jewish peasants of the region (Loye Bradley Ashton). These social and cultural issues certainly affect the exchange between Jesus and the woman.

Jesus continues; “Let the children be fed first.” And who are “the children?” They are the Hebrew children, the children of Israel, the Jews. Jesus reminds this Gentile woman that the Jews are the chosen people. He reminds his disciples that his mission is first to the Jews. You and I can be reminded, as we read this passage, that we are indebted to the Jews. As one scholar puts it, Gentile Christians – like you and I -- are “honorary Jews” (Krister Stendahl).

The Gentile woman gets it. She says, “Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” Jesus commends her for her insight and fulfills her request: “The demon has left your

daughter.

Here we begin to move from shock to awe.

II. And Awe (vv.31-37).

Yes, Jesus shocks me this morning. He calls this poor woman a dog!...a female dog! Scandalous!!

But soon I am in awe of him. He commends the woman for what she says. He heals her daughter. He heals a deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus touches him, spits, looks up into heaven, says “Be opened,” and the man’s ears are opened.

In Elizabeth Yates’ book, Howard Thurman: Portrait of a Practical Dreamer, there is the story that when Thurman was in India in 1935, he spoke in many villages. Late one night a boy knocked on his door. His dress revealed that he was an “untouchable,” and he told this story in broken, faltering English: “I stood outside the building and listened to your lecture Sahib Doctor. Tell me, please, can you give some hope to a nobody?” The boy fell to his knees and Thurman reached out compassionately to him. Thurman knew what it is to be classed as a “nobody.” As a black man, he had often endured rejection in a white man’s world. But he had committed his life to the ministry of a love that identifies with suffering humanity, of reaching out to the “nobodies” of this world in the name of Jesus Christ. (Donald B. Strobe)

This morning’s Gospel reading is a story of how Jesus deals with the nobodies of this world.

Closing.

Jesus shocks us. His rejection of the Gentile woman is disturbing. We might want to reflect on our own knee-jerk rejection of people who don’t fit our expectations, people whom we view as “nobodies.”

There's a little scene in the Broadway musical, "Shenandoah," in which this older mountain couple sit down to eat with their son and daughter-in-law. Before they break bread together, the father offers this prayer:

"Lord, bless me and my wife,
John and his wife;
us four, no more. Amen."

Who is welcome in our church? in our homes? in our lives? Are there restrictions? Do we reject people – whether intentionally or not -- because they look different?...or they don't fit our categories of what a Christian should be?...or they don't measure up to our cultural requirements?

Jesus awes us. He eventually praises the Gentile woman for her words. He heals her daughter. He heals the deaf man with the speech impediment.

Are you ready to honor your heritage as an "honorary Jew?" Are you ready for the shock and awe of Jesus and the radical change he brings?

May Jesus surprise and shock you into paying attention. May you be awed by the healing he is working in your life.

Amen.