

The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz  
Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
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Mark 7:24-37

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This week I've been thinking about all the things I do for my children. They are still little so it's a lot of the bodily function things baths, diapers, potty trips, wiping noses and making sure they eat. I know that as they age I will do different things for them, teach them how to make the bed rather than just put on the throw pillows, show them how to drive a car, balance a checking account, show them how to make my grandmother's cure all for everything from a cold to a broken heart (Pastina and College Inn). I do a lot for my kids, and I will continue to do a lot for my kids. I'll do almost anything for my kids.

- Walk across hot coals- check.
- Skip a meal- I'd do that.
- Stay awake well past my bedtime- I've been there done that.
- Go to a meet the teacher night - even though I've already met the teacher- I'll do that too.

Why do I do these things? Because I love my children with all my heart.

This is exactly what the Syrophenician woman in today's gospel is doing- she is advocating for her daughter the only way she can, the only way she knows how, she is reaching for the last best hope by speaking to this Jewish healer, who is trying to hide in Tyre.

But what happens when she goes to meet this Jesus, this son of David, this teacher, this rabbi, is not what I expect to hear from Jesus. This is not Good News. Jesus calls this desperate mother, who is asking for help for her daughter, unworthy, and worse than calling her unworthy, he calls her a "dog".

I am not okay with this. This is not the Jesus quote I want crocheted on a throw pillow. I do not like this Jesus who says you aren't one of my people, I'm not here for you.

But I love this mother's response. It's almost as if she had already thought of all the possible insults this Jewish leader could throw her way and she had a clever retort in her back pocket. Or even better she was well educated in the art of rhetoric and she knew how to pose a counter argument that would "stump the rabbi".

I imagine the surprised look on Jesus face as her response of "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" spilled over her lips.

She knows he doesn't see her as his equal, and she doesn't expect him to, but she also knows that her daughter is worth speaking up for, and she knows that if she doesn't speak for her daughter now, no one will.

The same can be said for the friends of the man in the Decapolis who was deaf and had a problem speaking. He was unable to speak for himself so they presented him to Jesus and asked for help on his behalf. They gave him a voice, when he had none, like the child who was afflicted by the demon.

In the church, we have a tradition of prayers of petition and intercession, prayers for ourselves and others. In praying for our own needs and those of others we believe that Jesus listens to and responds to those needs in our hearts and minds. We use passages like this to inspire those kinds prayers. We pray for the sick the injured, those who are suffering and those who are alone weekly in the prayers of the people. Here we have a healing service weekly on Friday afternoons at 12:30 where we pray for healing for individuals, for the Richmond Community and the world. We believe that Jesus heals through prayer.

But prayer is not our only avenue for caring for those in need. We have been given an advocate in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit which softens even the hardest hearts. I believe this is what happened in Jesus' case the Holy Spirit might have smacked him upside the head, proverbially of course, by having this Syrophenician mother come to his feet and ask for help. Remember, Jesus was human after all, and he had some learning to do, while he was here about the nature of love and the nature of humanity. This is one of those learning moments.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't only change the hearts and minds of those in authority but also inspires each of us to use our voices to speak for the voiceless. Neither the daughter or the man were able to speak for themselves. But they were both provided with advocates who had their best interests at heart, regardless of the consequences for themselves. This is what it means to be an advocate, to use one's own voice to advocate for those who are unheard, unseen, unacknowledged, and unrecognized.

It is expected that I would advocate for my kids. They are mine after all, blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh. I can be one fierce mama, I learned from the best of them. You don't mess with any of the women in my family, I can tell you stories.

But I am more than a mother to my two kids, I am a Christian, which means I am called to advocate for all of my brothers and sisters in Christ, but what today's gospel reminds me to do is advocate not only for my brothers and sisters in Christ, but all of my siblings in God's beloved Creation.

I am meant to be fierce when need be, I am meant to be protective and proactive. My life experience has made it so that I can think quickly and respond to the insults that are thrown in my directions, the names and the jibes and the attacks that come my way. So when I speak up for my kids, it is not just my biological children, but the babies who come here on Friday for Red Door, the toddlers who make messes in the nursery on Tuesday Night during Circles, (the Godly Play kids who are making a ruckus in the

chapel right now), the K-12 graders who are filling the upper room, the students from VCU who sit and color with me on Thursday I do not think of the way that I feel, but I think of the way that they deserve the world to be.

I think of the world that Jesus promises, at first to only the chosen, the Jews, but eventually to the Gentiles and to us by extension, and I think that if I take a deep breath, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide, to protect and to inspire me, I might just be able to say “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs”, and begin to change the hearts and minds of those who would call me a dog.

I ask for each of you to consider who you are being asked to speak up for? Are you ready? God will give you the words, God has already given you an advocate, and God is with you as you go out into the world to speak for the voiceless.

Take a breath with me.

Be inspired with me.

Now You are ready.

Go and speak in love for those who aren’t being heard.