

Metanoia – a change of heart.

James 2:1-10, 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

In the movie *A Leap of Faith*, starring Steve Martin, there is a song that I have always loved. Steve Martin is an evangelist, who uses lots of tricks to get people to believe, and in the end, a true miracle occurs and he is transformed. In the end it is Steve Martin that takes a leap of faith.

The lyrics of the song I was speaking of says this:

“I’ve been lonely, I’ve been cheated,
I’ve been misunderstood.
I’ve been washed up, I’ve been put down,
And told I’m no good
But with you I belong.
Cause you help me be strong,
There’s a change in my life,
Since you came along.
A man gets crazy when his world is all wrong,
And a heart gets weary when it doesn’t belong
When the road gets rocky, Lord, you’ve got to keep on,
Let the new light come shining on through.”

This song speaks about how we belong to God, and with God in one’s life, our life can be transformed. Metanoia is a Greek word which means “Change of Heart” This word describes a moment when something in our world shifts, something in our lives completely changes our world view. A moment when we are stopped in our tracks and we see things completely differently...and for the better.

It has been a challenging week. I was asked on Friday, “Karen...what is wrong with this world? What is going on?” To say that people are upset with the latest developments in the struggle with COVID is an understatement. Society is being divided, there are lines being drawn in the sand, which after living in a pandemic

for so long can only serve to deepen the pain, struggle, suffering and sense of unease and uncertainty. People are tired, our care workers are burnt out. Small business owners and teachers, parents are crying out about a lack of leadership. What are we to do? Maybe this is why the song from *A Leap of Faith* keeps coming to mind.

The passage from James today is very clear, as Christians we are not to show favouritism to anyone, for it goes against godly living. It is not our place to pass judgement. It is not our place to show partiality. Jesus makes it pretty clear that our imperative is to “love your neighbour as yourself.” Period! End of sentence.

Thomas Merton writes:

“Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business, and in fact, it is nobody’s business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbours worthy if anything can.”

Who is worthy? According to God everyone is worthy for we have been lovingly created. This text written by James points to the profound issue of acceptance and the richness of the diversity that comes with inclusion of all.

The passage from Matthew today shows the human side of Jesus. Jesus is called out in this passage. Jesus at first shows partiality. All humans in leadership have the potential to lose track of what they have been called to do, even Jesus. In order to truly understand what happened in this exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman you need to have some context. “This woman had everything going against her when she pushed her way into Jesus’ presence. She was a woman and a Gentile (not Jewish) from the wrong side of the tracts. She had no right to engage Jesus in conversation”¹ One commentator suggested that it would be like a homeless person interrupting the dinner of the president of the USA to ask a favour. But this woman does it anyway. She goes against customs and begs Jesus to save her daughter’s life. She was more afraid of what would happen to her child, then she was about what would happen to her if she broke this custom. What comes next confuses us, because Jesus, didn’t respond in a way that we would expect. Jesus doesn’t say, “Okay, where is your daughter, I will heal her.” Instead he basically calls her a dog. But instead of feeling discarded and insulted by these comments, she acts on faith. She challenges Jesus, and points out to him that even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs. She points out how ridiculous social conventions can be, just like Jesus does over and over again.

¹ Amy C. Howe, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 44.

How many times did Jesus break social convention and eat with the unclean? How many times did he perform healings on the Sabbath? The courage of this woman stops Jesus and opens his heart, reminds him of what he has been called to do.

Faith teaches us that “social conventions should not stand in the way of helping those in need.” To put it another way, God’s love expands beyond all barriers. And when Jesus heals people, he not only fixes their physical ailments, but also restores them to their community, bring acceptance and belonging. Jesus went through a metanoia moment – he had a change of heart, his heart was opened and expanded. The next verses describe another healing where again people come to Jesus asking for help on behalf of another. In this case, Jesus takes the deaf man to a private spot and says, “Be opened.” Suddenly the man can hear and speak plainly again. The man has been healed and restored. The power of faith is bringing people to wholeness. Faith brings people together in the spirit of peace, harmony, respect, acceptance and love.

I was reminded of a story I read, and though it is probably not totally accurate or true, I believe that it is inspiring. The story spoke about the philosophy of Ubuntu, which finds its origins in some regions of South Africa. In practice Ubuntu means believing the common bonds within a group are more important than any individual arguments and divisions within it. Ubuntu promotes restorative justice and a community centric ethos. Ubuntu means that “we have the ability as people to dig into our human values to go for the best of them, in order to bring about healing and to bridge the gap.”

The story that I read which may or may be true is this. When someone does something wrong. They are taken to the center of the village and surrounded by their tribe for 2 days. During which the community names and speaks of all the good the person has done. They believe that each person is good, yet sometimes we make mistakes. They unite in this ritual to encourage the person to reconnect with their true nature. The belief is that unity and affirmation have more power to change behaviour than shame and punishment. Ubuntu – humanity towards others

The woman who confronted Jesus, had faith in him. She reminded him of his goodness and compassion. And in the end Jesus healed her daughter because of her faith and what she did and said.

In the baptism today we all pledged that we would “continue to support you, walk with you, and grow with you. With God’s help, we will live out our baptism as a loving community in Jesus Christ: nurturing one another in faith, upholding one

another in prayer, encouraging one another in God's work." We are promising to love each other unconditionally. To love in spite of our failures and frailties.

When we make mistakes, we do not dwell on these actions, nor do we call them out...instead, we focus on the good in each other. We hold these qualities up and as a community we lift one another up. This is what it means to build up the body of Christ. Every person is worthy!

The scriptures demonstrate how the courage and the faith of a person who is not part of the community can cause a metanoia moment where the leader has a change of heart. Being a community of faith, means that we need to rely on each other, AND we need to help each other stay true to our call as a community. For faith without works is not faith.