

PENTECOST 16

Proper 18 - Year B

Dr. Carolin Frueh is currently in the process of obtaining an M.Div. from Church Divinity School of the Pacific for bivocational ministry. She holds a Ph.D. in physics and researches satellites and space debris.

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Jesus, God incarnate, is sometimes human, all too human, borrowing the latter part of the phrase from the great Nietzsche. He does not cease to provide discomfort, as is so evident in the Gospel passage. And one very well may argue alongside some scholars that Jesus was testing the stranger in today's reading, holding back while having already decided for the healing, or only joking – familiar strategies in secular contexts as well – to re-interpret or re-narrate distasteful statements made in all too understandable situations as a result of a fatigued, burned-out human state, when all that is sought is to be far away and unknown to everybody. The strikingly different treatment the alien woman (Mark names Tyre as the place, with “Gentile” and “Syrophenician” as qualifiers) receives compared to the healing of a Gentile in chapter 5:1-20, even without claiming chronological order, is a vexing juxtaposition, as many authors have pointed out.

It should be noted that it is unclear if the term “dogs” used in the Gospel passage is an actual slur¹. In any case, “κυνάριον” is not a street dog but a pet with a rightful place underneath the kitchen table. Ultimately, Jesus claims to be moved not by the faith but by the words (λόγος) of the woman's argument. He states that what is needed is already present, produced unavoidably and inevitably as excess, a nuisance by-product even.

Interestingly, neither Jesus nor the woman debates or obliterates the hierarchical order of identity or ethnicity². Although in our current society, some would, only half-jokingly, point out that some pets may have a higher station than some humans of certain societal groups, the hierarchy that is suggested is a need-based one. And needs - not always and not exclusively, of course - often run along cultural and societal lines due to historical, societal, and cultural developments. The Epistle echoes this reversal of the typical wealth-based societal hierarchy, denoted as partiality, and the hierarchy of need, which naturally extends towards actionable rather than passive faith.

Miracles as divine intervention³, understood in the broadest sense of the term, are often cast in an incompatibilist view with respect to the laws of nature; still, it should be noted that even in an incompatibilist understanding, the laws of nature are by no means obsolete. By far not the only option, various variants of compatibilist views of a divine intervention well within the laws of nature exist. Healings, as *power encounters*, pose particular explanatory challenges in either view. They do, however, speak to the general desire for human relief from suffering in the broader sense, as clearly formulated in the Old Testament passage. Here, the acclamation to strengths is

¹ Compare e.g. the discussion of Mark D. Nanos *Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs'* (Philippians 3:2): *1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog?*, *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009), as pointed out by J.C.H. Smith in *The Construction of Identity in Mark 7:24-30: The Syrophenician Woman and the Problem of Ethnicity*, *Biblical Interpretation* 20 (2012) 458-481, who argues that even if it is not a slur it can be understood as functioning as one in the passage.

² which is then again consistent with Mark 5:18-20.

³ See, e.g., the excellent article from D. Kim *Special Divine Action and the Miraculous*. *Theology and Science*, 22(2), 274–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2351640>, (2024) discussing different streams of divine interaction interpretations and more details on incompatibilist and compatibilist positions.

connected with the focus on the mission to be ready for a renewed (re)creation. As such, in connection with the epistle in particular, it serves as a reminder of the attention to the actionability of faith rather than a passive receiving stance.

Despite the bad reputation of hierarchies in general, where and how do hierarchies of need make sense? Is triage the same as a hierarchy?

Discussion Questions

Jesus is potentially so human as to change his mind and his initial statement based on a rational argument. Is that an additional relational point to one's own human experience that is potentially consoling, or alienating in view of Christ's fully divine nature? Is Jesus, as the one without sin, still intact as an argument?

How do healing and a cure differ? What do healing miracles mean in light of modern medicine?

Food waste, trash, and debris are an abundance that has transformed into a nuisance and a problem by its sheer presence. How can we think and act further, avoiding Jevon's paradox and what one might dub the Goodwill phenomenon of increased consumerism and secondary effects in light of a seemingly ethically palpable way to rid of the excess⁴?

What are today's power encounters of God's intervention, if any?

Published by the Office of Communication of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017 © 2024 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations, with the exception of the Psalms and/or canticles, are from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Psalms and canticles are drawn from the Book of Common Prayer.

⁴ See, e.g., <https://q.sustainability.illinois.edu/the-not-so-fashionable-side-of-the-thrifting-industry/>