

Donnybrook

10 February 2022

Welcome

I thought for a moment that the Gospel was going to end with "And there was the devil, gone!" The story we have just heard is popular for a variety of reasons. The Syro-Phoenician woman is concerned about her daughter, in a very human way. Jesus is quite sharp with her and yet she is not deterred. She responds to him with a ready wit. And then, most marvellous, we see Jesus in the moment changing his mind.

Topic

And yet, it is a strange story: how can it speak to us today?

Steps

It is a strange story. Jesus seems to go to Tyre and Sidon without any particular purpose, he goes to a place he has never been and is afraid of being recognised. (These are the days before Facebook!!). After a chance encounter with a foreigner and her witty reply, he suddenly heads back to Galilee. Put like that, the story is full of puzzles and quite mysterious.

Perhaps this may help. The historical Jesus had very, very little contact with non-Jews, Gentiles and pagans. By the time Mark was written, there were plenty of non-Jews in the Christian movement but still integration was a problem. Mark's story is a kind of retrojected permission for the mission to the Gentiles. As we see from the story of the woman, their need of healing and grace is just as deep as that of Jews. And so, in a sense, it is okay to include Gentiles in the Christian project.

Conclusion

In our time, as we undertake the synodal pathways, we too are being called beyond our comfort zones. As we try to listen to what God wants of his church, we need to pay attention to the hungers of the heart, no matter where they are found. The cry of the human heart is heard everywhere: you have made us (all) for yourself and our hearts are restless until they come to rest in you.