



Family to Outsiders and Untouchables

In the stillness of rural Kenya, I received a priceless gift—hours of absolute silence to read Scripture, observing Christ's pursuit of outsiders. From Samaria to Syrophenicia and into the lives of outcasts and untouchables, I began to notice how confusing and challenging these encounters were for the disciples. As Jesus disclosed his identity, and as outsiders responded in faith, the disciples struggled to welcome, as colleagues and kin, people very unlike themselves. And, they did not suffer silently the challenge to their assumptions and privilege.

Remember their astonishment to find Jesus in conversation with a Samaritan woman—the longest recorded in Scripture (John 4:4–30, 35–42). Was *she* the reason they had traveled so far? Why did Jesus reveal his identity to *her*—a woman from a hated people? Despite her lowly status, Jesus sought her out and she responded with a contagious faith. Christ welcomed her as kin, and this surprised the disciples.

Unlike the Samaritan woman, the disciples were privileged insiders. They saw Christ heal the centurion's son and the man at the pool of Bethesda. As news of these miracles spread, an enormous crowd assembled. Testing their faith, Jesus asked the disciples how they would feed five thousand. The disciples did not recognize that as Messiah, Jesus could feed a multitude with just a little food (John 6:1–13). They soon met a woman who, with far less privilege, had the very faith they lacked.

While Christ was in Tyre, a Syrophenician woman begged him to heal her daughter (Matt. 15:21–30). Testing her faith, he declared that he could not toss bread to dogs—those deemed unworthy of God's gifts. To our amazement, her faith was strong, standing in contrast to the privileged disciples. She told Jesus that even the dogs eat the crumbs under the table. God welcomes all who believe, regardless of gender or ethnicity. Her faith, too, was contagious. Like the Samaritan woman, she realized that in Christ she was valued, included, and commissioned.

Consider the prostitute who joined a dinner party with Jesus uninvited (Luke 7:36–50). Approaching Christ with unbound hair, like a bride on her wedding night, she washed his feet with her tears,

dried them with her hair, and lavished them with expensive perfume. Her encounter with Christ was a spectacle of intimate love and abandon that troubled their host. Shaming both, he told his guests that if Jesus were really a prophet, he would realize that the woman touching him was a great sinner. In response, Christ honored her great love and humility—traits strikingly absent in the host.

Just before Jesus' death, another woman anointed him, evoking indignation from the disciples. They did not realize that her anointing prepared Christ for his greatest work of all—a shameful death that would reconcile humanity to God. By pouring the oil on Christ's head, this woman anointed the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, just as the priests anointed Israel's kings. Affirming her spiritual leadership, Jesus told the disciples, “When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare

me for burial. Truly, I tell you wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done for will also be told, in memory of her” (Matt. 26:10–13). This woman welcomed what Peter could not—that Christ would be rejected and crucified. Hers was the greatest priestly anointing in Israel's history.

Christ continually welcomed insiders, inviting them as guests beside him. Yet, they did not always value his invitation. In contrast, women from other tribes and nations placed themselves on the guest list. These women insisted on being fed the crumbs under the table. Their faith made them daughters of Abraham and family in the Jesus-tribe, a kinship that offended the privileged. Though they were shamed by religious authorities, their humility, agency, and love marked them as Israel's spiritual leaders. They were the first to accept Calvary as the ultimate challenge to powers and dominions that colluded to oppress God's beloved. Christ pursued them intentionally, welcoming their faith, commissioning them as leaders, and including them as kin.

Jesus and the apostle Paul welcomed outsiders (Gentiles, slaves, women) into a baptism in Christ that joined them as family to Jews, the free, and males. Then and now, Christ's gospel challenges human pride and privilege, but there we find the narrow gate that leads to life.

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