
ONE GREAT SUNDAY OF SHARING 2015



WORSHIP RESOURCE

1985 - 2015: Celebrating 30 Years of Cultural Diversity...

One Great Sunday of Sharing is held each year on the third Sunday in July, or another date best suited to the local setting.

One Great Sunday of Sharing in 2015 gives us an opportunity for Uniting Church congregations, Faith Communities and Fellowship Groups to celebrate 30 years since the Church declared in 1985 at the 4th National Assembly: “the Uniting Church in Australia is a multicultural Church”.

This resource is to assist you in planning for your Sunday worship service. We have chosen *the Story of the Syro-Phoenician Woman* in Mark 7:24-30 as the text for the **One Great Sunday of Sharing**. Used as much or as little as you want.

Shalom!

KOH Swee-Ann, Director of Intercultural Unit, Commission for Mission 

“We need a culture of inclusion.” - Pope Francis

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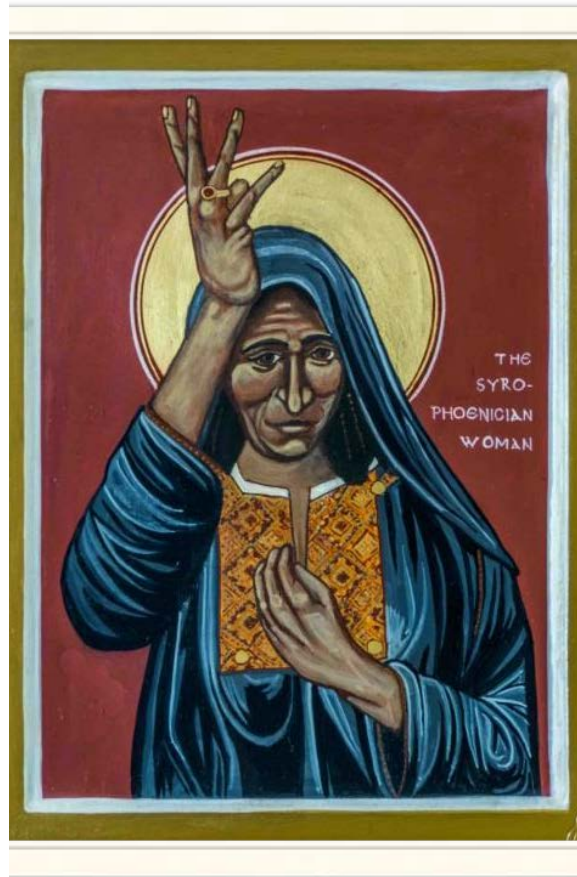
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Bible Text: Mark 7:24 - 30

The Story of the Syrophenician Woman

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.



The Icon (above) of the Syrophenician woman is written by Rev. Peter Blackwood.

“Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin...”

- MARK 7:26A

Background to the Story

By the time of the writing of the Gospel of Mark, the Hellenistic and Jewish cultures would have blended to some extent as the Christian community became a merged family of Gentile and Jewish Christians.

These Christians lived alongside the Jewish people with increasingly close proximity throughout the region. Conflict developed both inside and outside the community.

No conflict was as contentious as the struggle over the purity system, which can be defined as “a social system organised around the contrasts or polarities of pure and impure, clean and unclean.” Purity issues created division between people. In order to be a part of the community one had to be pure, meaning that one was “free from any physical, moral, or ritual

“Heavenly Father, our Lord and our God you have called us all to be holy. Through the example of the Syrophenician Woman of Tyre may we be strengthened in our love for all people, our knowledge of God, and our faith in Christ.”

“Bless this icon, and let this ancient woman speak to us of her love for her daughter, her understanding of God's grace, and her faith in Jesus. God, we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

contamination.” Simple contact with anyone or anything considered impure rendered a person unclean. The unclean person was ostracised and instantly expelled from the fellowship of the community. “Physical signs of impurity were seen as the symptoms of ... moral or religious imperfection ... which necessitated the complex system of purificatory rituals” for that is the only way one would have been welcomed back into that fellowship of the community. “Rules surrounding meals were deeply imbedded in the purity system” which was diligently studied and followed so that one would know what one could eat and who one could eat with. The power of the purity conflict in the cultures of the first century cannot be emphasised enough, for without a thorough understanding of this struggle, one may not understand the depth of the radical inclusion that emerged when Jesus interacted with the Syrophenician woman. Within this cultural context – the verbal interaction between the Syrophenician woman and Jesus becomes an intriguing puzzle with which to deepen our journey.

Introduction

Biblical teaching on women comes from a variety of genres within scripture. The Epistles in the New Testament, for instance, give explicit commands to believers about how women should behave in worship and also contain inferences about the possible roles of women by the examples of female Christians in the early church. These are the kinds of passages to which one usually turns when studying Biblical teachings on women.

However, we should not limit our study to just the Epistles. Narratives also have the capacity to teach, albeit often implicitly. Furthermore, most of what we know about Jesus-the one whom

Call to Worship

One: We come, God of the Journey,
a people from different places,
different histories,
different cultures.

All: ***We come hoping to find
companionship for the journey,
solidarity for the struggle.***

One: We gather, God of Hospitality,
around your “welcome table,*
a table not yet round, but rounding.


All: ***We gather seeking to become
a “round-table people,
welcoming of all,
with no preferred seating,
no firsts and no lasts, ...
and no corners for
‘the least of these’”*** (Chuck Lathrop).

One: We yearn, God of diversity,
for a new way of living and relating...
as neighbours not strangers,
as brothers and sisters
not ‘them and us’.

All: ***We yearn to live fully
celebrating both the diversity
of our human family,
and the unity of our call
to peace, love and justice.***

AMEN. 

Christians are supposed to emulate in both faith and practice--comes from the New Testament Gospel narratives. Thus, when it comes to teachings on women, we can look to examples of Jesus' interaction with women in order to learn something about them and their place in God's kingdom. The story of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7.24-30 is one such example.


This story is one of the most intriguing healing accounts in the Gospels. The primary elements of the narrative that have made it so are: **(a)** on first glance, it appears to present a narrow-minded Jesus, who has limited his mission to only one small segment of humanity; and **(b)** it seems to narrate a battle of wits between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman-one which Jesus loses! 

A Prayer of Commitment

“Creator God, we believe that you have created all the nations of the world to live together in peace, sharing their riches, enjoying their diverse languages, cultures and colours, and caring for one another’s need.

Grant us the wisdom and the courage to break down all the walls that we ourselves built to separate us one from another. Empower us to rid ourselves of selfishness, indifference, prejudice and hate.

Fill us with your glorious vision that springs from our common beginning as human beings created in your image and points to our common goal as your renewed creation.”

- Asia Sunday 2013 CCA 

Notes for Sermon

(I) According to the way things were in Jesus’s time, the Syrophenician woman had at least three strikes against her:

- (a) she was a woman, and social contact with a man could be seen as scandalous.
- (b) She was a Gentile, not a Jew; not a part of God’s people and
- (c) She was Syrophenician, who were bitter rivals and enemies of the Jews.


(II) The Syrophenician woman lived on the other side of the lines drawn in Jesus' day: pagan, female, foreigner. By playing the part of the religious authorities, Jesus actually highlights the absurdity of exclusion based on superficial issues such as ethnicity and gender.

(III) According to Ched Myers, "This woman- marginalised by race, gender, and class- taught Jesus something about the inclusivity of God's realm. Jesus comes to see more fully the radical inclusivity of the gospel he proclaims through the trust and daring of this woman. He is moved from the social norms of first-century Mediterranean 'honour culture' that limited his vision and compassion. He is moved from a stance of excluding to one of including." (*Ched Myers, "Say to This Mountain": Mark's Story of Discipleship, 84*)


(IV) Some people have pointed out that there is an important Old Testament background element to this story. The woman isn't just described as a Gentile; Mark is careful to tell us that she is a Syrophenician, a resident of Tyre and Sidon. This should remind us of the time when the great prophet Elijah visited this very same area, provided bread for a desperately poor widow and then brought her son to life from the dead (1 Kgs 17:8-24). But if you compare Jesus with Elijah, it actually makes the problem worse: Jesus' initial response to his Syrophenician acquaintance is much more severe and insensitive than Elijah's unhesitated willingness to provide bread for the widow and heal her son.

(V) We can never know if what we have here is history or a story where the story teller was a little careless. He certainly had no compunction about portraying Jesus as saying what many would have said: Israel are God's children; Gentiles are like the dogs (not nice little lap dogs or puppies; the intention is negative). Whether in the story or in reality, the good news is that Jesus refused to remain bound by such distinctions. He crossed the boundary. A woman from the coastal regions of Palestine persuaded him. What an extraordinary woman! How much this says about women and their inclusion!

When the story teller mentions that the girl was healed at a distance, it is still preserving some of the conservative sentiment about pious Jews not entering the houses of Gentiles, such as we see also in the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13) and in Peter's qualms about going to the centurion (Acts 10).

The story illustrates the new inclusiveness of the gospel. Faced with human need Jesus is persuaded that people matter most. No one can be excluded. All must be given food. None can be treated like dogs. The story celebrates this reality. There are many 'dogs' in our community who know what it is like to be shut out, told to wait, given second best. Calling them cute puppies or 'the blessed poor' does not address the issue, as long as they are treated like dogs. They have been treated as dogs so much so that it had become natural to treat them that way and to ignore their plight and our often naive prejudice - until the Syrophenician woman gives them a voice. Jesus listened to that voice. Those voices are still to be heard, for those with ears to hear. *(William Loader: Pentecost 14: 6 September Mark 7:24-37)* 

Another Perspective

"I am indebted to Hisako Kinukawa, 'Decolonizing Ourselves' for educating me on the need for decolonizing the text by recognising oppression from both imperialism and patriarchy. I was challenged to realise that often white middle-class women (as I am) analyse patriarchy in the text due to their own oppressive life experiences, but neglect the study of imperialism because their life experience does not give them insight. For example, I may be living a life that is enhanced as an indirect result of oppression. I found it helpful to explore my own status as one who is a "cultural coloniser" and what impact that has on my study of Scripture. This requires being able to "discern whom we are oppressing and by whom we are oppressed." (pg. 133) If I am able, I may be teachable enough to become radically inclusive of people who are different from me." 

- Cindy F. Serio, an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Creator of the universe, the eternal God who is the source of times, we worship you. We take refuge in you. You called us from age to age, and led us step by step; you are our past, present and future. We gather here to give thanks for the ecumenical journey of the Uniting Church in Australia, and for the witness of the Synod of VicTas. You who brought the Church into union are continuing to shape her life to reflect your compassion, justice and diversity.

We thank you for the 30 years of journey since we declared ourselves to be a multi cultural Church. It is not our making but you who have welcomed people of many cultures and languages into your Church. You invite us into a deeper fellowship and understanding in order that we may accept, appreciate, learn from and celebrate each others' faith that is expressed through their cultures.

Grant us grace, humility, wisdom and a sense of adventure as we continue our journey as we commit ourselves to you and each other in faith and good will. O God of many cultures help us to acknowledge the diversity you are and to receive the gospel that comes through each culture you have created.

May you continue to surprise us, and open our hearts and minds to the wonder of your creation as we learn to live in the diversity of our faith expressions and love towards you and each other.

We ask this in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN. 

- Contributed by Dev Anandarajan

A Responsive Confession

Male: Let us now look into ourselves and see where we have deviated from God's will for us to live in harmony, justice and peace with one another.

All: *We confess our participation in all that has caused our disunity, conflicts, separation and brokenness from one another.*

Female: We live in a world where people are still judged by their skin colour, ethnic background, accent, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, political conviction, religious affiliation. We come from a world where people are lumped together by external likenesses, where people are accepted or rejected because of particularities of their personal or group identity.

All: *We seek a different vision of life.*


We seek a more inclusive community, a more expansive welcome, a more holy hospitality for all people. We confess, O Holy One, that we are part of the problem. We acknowledge that we mirror in ourselves the fragmentation of the world around us. We have been influenced by its values and well trained in its patterns of thought and action. We are immersed in its subtle oppressions as well as its blatant acts of injustice. Even without knowing it, our lives have been polluted by popular opinion and shaped by cultural rituals and routines.

We seek a cleansing of our souls.

We seek a softening of our hearts.

We seek to be saturated in your love.

We seek to reach out and include those who are different from us.

We seek to live in the authentic community of the Christ, in whose name we pray. AMEN. 



A Story of Diversity On Friday Evening


I looked at the clock, it was 5.30 pm, Heather (our church council chair person) came with big smile. Every Friday she comes to prepare meals for Friday evening group, we called it, Imit8 Jesus. The fellowship was normally started with meals at 6.30 pm followed with prayer, sharing spiritual reflection and life experience for an hour.

Church members provided meals and we asked each person to contribute \$3.00, for main meal and dessert.

From time to time, people from different parts of the world bring different spiritual perspectives and experiences. People have come from Bolivia, Colombia, South Africa, Cambodia, Philippine, Korea, Sri Lanka, Persian, Chile, Indonesia, Germany, Ukraine, Sudan and local Aussie born.

What has amazed me is from time to time, when a new person came – she/he would bring a new perspective and enrich our fellowship. Although we are a very open and welcoming group, there is always a sense of uncertainty when a new person joins in. We can't assume anything. We just need to open our hearts and arms to embrace a new person – and let God's Spirit work freely among us.

I remembered when Sook Lee came and shared his life story which centre around Cambodia during Pol Pot's Regime, the ways he survived in that horrific situation – then journeyed from Pnon Phen to Malaysia by boat in late 1970's. His life story was similar but with a lot of differences in detail from Maree, Milad and their daughter Sheyda who came from Iran, under a very different political system. The ways Maree, Milad and Sheyda survived and sustained their faith were amazing and beyond our imagination.

For us, each person is a gift for others and each person enriches our community. 

Apwee Ting

Minister of the Word at Dandenong Uniting Church

Prayer for a Diverse Church

Creator of all races and ethnicities, help us see that a diverse church and community is the way to deepen our lives and to know you more deeply. Guide us to see that entering into a vital and just relationship with others who are different from us is the way to make ourselves whole.

God who creates diversity
hear our prayer.

This year we celebrate the UCA 30th year declaration of being a 'multicultural' church – continue to journey with us as we seek to make this declaration a reality in all aspects of church life. Open our hearts and minds that we will be willing to embrace all things necessary for a truly inclusive church.

God who creates diversity
hear our prayer.

Guard us from fear of the “other,” from the fear that our own security is threatened if we become truly willing to make a place at the table for all. Open us to live out what we profess to believe:
That our true security is in You and in your call to justice and peace,
That we are a part of your global family,
That, because of your Incarnation, the human dignity of everyone is sacred, and that we are constantly called to conversion and inclusive community.

God who creates diversity
hear our prayer.

Journey with us God,
as we pave and create new ways of being a truly inclusive church -
give us the courage to breakdown structures that divide and open our hearts to be challenged to things that are different from our worldviews.
Give us the spirit to embrace diversity and difference.

God who creates diversity
hear our prayer.

Continue - Prayer for a Diverse Church

We pray that you help us recognise any forms of prejudice in our hearts, and in our legal systems and social structures. Forgive us for our sins of exclusion. Heal our souls and spirits. Ground us in compassion for all through your grace.

God who creates diversity
hear our prayer.


Help us take the steps you call us to take
To build a more just community and inclusive church,
Where difference is respected
and where we can all join hands
and rejoice in the common good.
Through the mercy of God, we pray.

AMEN.  **Fie Marino**

The Context of Diversity

Jesus himself worked in the context of diversity - a culturally Jewish man who lived and worked with society's most marginalised peoples. Jesus himself broke barriers of race, class, gender, and social norms to create a community of believers where all were welcome. Through the story of the Canaanite or Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). Jesus' own assumptions were challenged. Jesus enabled encounters with marginalised and diverse peoples to shape and change him.

Diversity is central to our faith and central to what it means to being called to be the Body of Christ. Diversity is a gift from God. Diversity is the DNA of a multicultural Church.

In 2015 the Uniting Church in Australia celebrations 30 years of cultural diversity. We are better as a Church if we truly embrace and celebrate our God given diversity! 

Another Story: Serving the Multicultural Springvale

by BEN GRUNDY

Like most churches Springvale Uniting Church has longstanding ties with its local community. Located in a thriving multicultural hub south east of Melbourne, the Springvale congregation has for decades fostered links with the area's successive waves of new migrants.

Springvale UC minister Rev Paul Creasey believes the Church needs to not simply reach out but respond and engage in the changing landscape of local communities.

In recent years the congregation has fundraised and worked to develop programs while strengthening links with other community groups, council members and local business leaders.

This work recently culminated in the opening of a multicultural Men's Shed utilised as a springboard for many other outreach and community support programs.

The four-year journey towards opening the Men's Shed links into a broader missional community space now called 'Wominjenka Place' – an Indigenous word for welcome.

"It's certainly not a typical men's shed – we're the first multicultural men's shed in Victoria and I think the first multicultural men's shed in Australia," Mr Creasey said.

"It's more to do with families; the men's shed is just one aspect of what we're doing. Wominjenka Place is about embracing the wider community around food, hospitality, culture and faith."

Building up the congregation's work in the community was in no small part due to the dedicated commitment of the diverse community at Springvale Uniting Church.

The congregation boasts more than a dozen different cultural backgrounds and a broad range of age groups.

Mr Creasey is adamant the congregation will continue to look to their community for opportunities.

"The whole idea is to be relevant to the community," he said.

"It's fine to run weekly church services but the challenge for us has been to grow within the local community.

"In a small congregation it's easy to turn inwards – this congregation has never done that. It's always had a focus towards what's happening around it.

"I think that has been the defining strength for Springvale Uniting Church – the ability to embrace these newly emerging cultures in Australia.

"With government changes and cutbacks to services the need to provide different styles of community support and more self-initiated programs are becoming increasingly important." 