

## Jesus Didn't Sleep Well That Night

### Second Sunday In Lent

March 13, 2022

Mark 7:24-30

He woke up in the middle of the night and started replaying what had happened, that encounter with the gentile woman, of Syrophenician origin. His mind was going!, processing it, with his deepest self, in the intimacy of his sleep (the unconscious), active dreaming, and now solitary wakefulness. Oh the mind! What a most marvelous and most baffling mystery! Sorry neuro scientists, you'll never understand it all, but do learn as much as you can.

Jesus is very accustomed to solitude and to awareness of his thoughts. He is a practitioner of what we now call centering prayer or meditation, and so has learned, through practice, how to be aware of thoughts and how to gently release them; so as to rest mindlessly in God; so as to become God infused. And like the Buddha, and other spirit people, this centering prayer or meditation, this God infusion, utterly changes how he lives, how he moves through the day, how he relates to people. Prayer changes, alters his mind.

Yes, Jesus was used to being alone with his thoughts...

But this was different. Very different. This was a sleepless night—troubled sleep and agitated wakefulness.

*I wish she hadn't done that.* He thought. He felt a little battered and bruised. *Why did I go there in the first place? It wasn't even my place to be, that territory. I guess I was just trying to get away from my people for a spell, to go where nobody knows me, so I could rest a little. All of this healing and preaching and building a justice movement can be exhausting....*

*But she should have known better. I still can't believe that happened. How she crossed the line.*

We'll rejoin Jesus-middle-of-the-night-thinking in a moment but first a reminder of the social map of Jesus time and place... the social map imprinted on his brain since birth...just the way things are in the world... so imprinted that it seems divinely ordained, like night or day, water or land, summer or winter. But this is about human beings. Jew or gentile, servant or free, male or female... this cultural map which indicates a place for everything and everything in its place. People that are okay in one place, or behave a certain way in one place, are out of place in another. And everyone just knows their place and how to behave.

Jesus was a Jew from the moment he was born until his death, raised in this 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish social world with this very clear social map. Sometimes called a purity map... the pure and the impure, the righteous and the sinner, whole and not whole, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. Everything works fine if you stay in your place.

Of course, this 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish social world is not unusual. Don't most societies have such maps? Think of the caste system of India. What about our society? Jodi Pfarr, whose book we are using this Lent, lays out our social map that normalizes one group over another. She maps the triangles, and who is normalized dominant. She reminds us that while those who are in the non normalized groups are only too well aware of this cultural map, those in the normalized groups are often blissfully unaware, not aware of all the benefits, that are set up for them. (Just think about right and left handedness, for example, and how we who are right handed take so much for granted and those who are left handed are always having to adjust and compensate, that is, to use more life energy to get through the day.) And even when legal systems change, when all are considered equal, all are treated equally before the law— whenever that happens- all have the vote, even then, still it takes time, years, decades, maybe centuries for the cultural map to change so that every group experiences life with the same freedom. And it's going to take all of us waking up, becoming keenly aware of the truth of how things really operate. Only then can we begin to change the cultural map and ourselves.

Jesus was a product of his society. He was shaped by the social map of his time and place. He was oh so human.

But there was something else that shaped him too. Something equally if not ultimately more powerful. When he went into the heart's secret room, into prayer or meditation, he melted into the oneness of God, he was consumed by love, infinite love, and this love paintbrush washed over all of those lines of the social map, blurring them, softly erasing them. This infinite love he knew in his heart while in prayer brought his mind back to the womb of God's compassion, where his mind originated, before he was imprinted with the social map of separation and dominance. While in prayer, this infinite love gently wipes away the imprinted social map, wipes it out of his mind. If we give ourselves over to God, God will wipe out all purity maps, caste systems, normalized dominant ways. These systems were not part of God's original creation.

And people felt that, when they were in Jesus' presence. They felt that he was different somehow. Around him, this one with a God saturated heart, around this spirit person, was a zone of liberation.

She felt it. The Syrophenician woman. She felt this.

But he had lapses. That social map is deeply ingrained!

Let's go back now to Jesus on that wakeful night. Let's continue to wonder together about what was going on in his mind.

*Yea... she crossed the line. A woman, of the Syrophenician race, a gentile. I'm a Jewish man. She knew we don't mix that way!*

*But I called her a dog... and I refused to heal her child.... What got into me?*

*I'm confused...I thought I was to love everyone, to be compassionate to everyone, especially the least of these, the powerless, the broken hearted, the ill... That's my life work, my calling to heal people and to heal the world of its injustice that causes suffering. Why did I refuse her? Why did I react in such a way? I've been working so hard, through my prayer life and my studies, to treat everyone as a child of God. And I thought I was changing, like how I relate now to women and to children: It's certainly not how I was raised. I thought I was so enlightened.*

*Why did I react so negatively, without love toward her? It's disturbing to me.*

*Could it be that the prejudice that I was raised in, that it's always present, like the air we breathe, and it is still sometimes stronger than God deep within me? I guess that prejudice against Syrophenician gentiles is more deeply imprinted in me than I realized. That I still have a lot of work to do on my mind so that it better reflects my heart's desire.*

*She was courageous. I guess that's what happens to mothers when their children are hurting. She taught me... I'm going to try to slow down a little. I have so much work to do and so many people need so much from me. But I need to slow down, breath deeply, become more aware of my thoughts, my feelings, so that I'm not so reactive, either calling someone a dog or being unctuous; so I can make space for others and so that I can respond with calm and considered compassion.*

*I'm so grateful for that woman and what she did, that she persisted. Her faith helped me too; helped me to wake up to my need for continued healing from the distortions of my upbringing and culture. This is hard work. There will be missteps. But I'm curious about my mind and heart and God, how they work together, and my calling has never felt stronger....*

*I'm so grateful she crossed the line...*

Jesus the pioneer of our faith was a spirit person, a prophet, a healer, a wisdom teacher and a product of his time and place. He was a human being.

Before I end my time at the pulpit this morning I want to lift this up. We have several major themes running through our church community this Lent 2022. Let me name them so we can all be aware.

Covid, of course, and the gradual return, weary, bewildered, and tentatively hopeful return from exile after two years, and still discerning how to best care for the most vulnerable in our community, in this our body of Christ.

The war in Ukraine. The headlines, the news, the brutality and suffering, how can this not be on our hearts these days...and we are even more mindful and heartfelt of all the refugees in the world, the most since WW II , refugees of all religions races and ethnicities, who are fleeing and seeking refuge in these times from war, violence, climate change disaster and poverty.

And then there is the work we are about now as a church in the wake of the lynching of George Floyd.... the work of reckoning. About this work, we are doing two things now as a church. They may seem paradoxical. You might be involved in both, you don't have to choose, but hope you will become involved in at least one...these two major streams...come from the same source, go to the same destination... but they are two major streams....

One is a call to greater action.

The other is a call to greater awareness.

One is a call to shape public policy now, to political action.

The other is a call to gradually, thoughtfully re-shape our church culture and community.

One is a call to multi racial and religious partnering and solidarity for our justice work beyond these walls, primarily at the capital in St. Paul.

The other is a call to changing how we are and unlocking the richness and power of diversity within this church, here at 35 W and Diamond Lake.

In February, our Isaiah and Race matters teams partnered in a pilot project on multi racial solidarity and this organizing is just beginning, for policy change.

And now In March, this Lent of 2022, the vision of the next 100 years of this church is beginning to gestate. The Centennial birthday is 2025. We're stirring up awareness of our congregation's history- the good, the bad, the perplexing... Mayflower. who we've been... who we are... how we are.... Especially as women, Gays and lesbians, people of color, people with disability, trans people....yes... All of the wonderful human diversity God created....How do we, Mayflower, live our diversity really? How do we need to change? How might we better shape

our way of being so we can have abundant life together? Who is God calling us to be in the next century of this church?

Let us pray....

God, you have called us your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

#### Sources

Borg, Marcus, Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time, HarperSan Fransico, 1994.

Pfarr, Jodi, The Urgency of Awareness: Unlocking the Power Within Individual, Organizational, and Community Efforts. MCP Books, 2019.

