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Tabor Presbyterian Church
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Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28
Good Trouble
Zoom Worship

The late congressman John Lewis tweeted in 2018 what has now become a clarion call - "*Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.*" He said it again March 1 of this year, when walking on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. He died four months later.

"Get into good trouble." Surely he was familiar with our story this morning - maybe as a boy he even preached on it to his chickens. As a grown man he would have known that this Canaanite woman was doing what was necessary to get a hearing; she was getting into "good trouble."

Sounds like she was annoying, with her shouts and persistence. On the surface, not knowing her, we may anticipate our own annoyance at people who shout, who won't let up, people who keep insisting, breaking with the niceties we often expect and want.

But this woman has no interest in how she appears or even what it means that she is different from them, as a Canaanite woman. Her priority is her daughter, and here we may be able enter her story with empathy.

Imagine someone you love is in dire straights, and there seems nothing can be done, except that you've heard of someone who could help, maybe the *last* person, the *last* hope. You're being shooed away. Maybe you can relate to her, raising her voice above their dismissiveness.

As a woman, she's used to not being heard — having to use all manner of strategy to get a word in.

Because she is used to her station in life, she has to come up with ways to be heard. She presses the point that Jesus is the "son of David," which links him *to her*, the Canaanite, because, after all, three women in Jesus' genealogy are outsider women: Rahab, Tamar, and Ruth.¹

¹Matthew 1:3, 5

Uncomfortable as it is, Matthew shows us a side to Jesus that is inconsistent with what our lectionary brings to us from Isaiah — that foreigners will be welcome: *Isaiah 56:8 - Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.*

Matthew brings to us a Jesus who is correctable. This Canaanite mother, in her desperation, pushes and persists, such that **she** is the one to change the mind of Jesus.

He eventually gives her what she wants, and thereby upends his own line of thinking about his role. His purpose will include, will need even!, those outside his tribe.

At first, he tells her he came for the lost tribes of Israel - **that** was his focus - but she widen his scope. Her persistence changed his mind.

To get what you want you must speak up. If you are in the hospital, you must say what you need, ask for it persistently; when you are in the job interview, you must ask for what you want, not expect that anything will be handed to you. In your relationships, the same.

Against the backdrop of everyone else's thinking, beliefs and priorities, this mother represents a truth of historical consistency: nothing changes by waiting for people to change their mind. *Nothing changes by waiting for people to change their mind.*

Minds and beliefs must be rattled, challenged, confronted, defied. This woman was defiant in the face of structures that assumed her inferiority. She ended up the protagonist of the story for what mattered most to her, her daughter. Jesus ends by saying

"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Milton Berle offered a funny quip - *"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door."* She built something that didn't exist at that moment, in the mind of Jesus. She built a door to a wider tent, she built a door for Jesus to actually follow the Isaiah that he consistently quoted throughout his

ministry. Isaiah said God opens wide the tent, welcoming foreigners who trust in the Lord.

We **can** get locked in our tunnel vision; especially, in the case of Jesus, when there is *so much to do* within one's own tribe. First things first, right?

Come to find out, outsiders throughout the Bible played a vital role in the narrative that has become the story of salvation. Matthew hints at this when he makes clear that outsiders make up part of the Jesus DNA.

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, sheltered two Hebrew spies and helped Joshua's army occupy Jericho.

Tamar, a Canaanite, twice-widowed, pretended to be a prostitute in order to gain entry into Judah's family. She tricked Judah, proved to him that she was with child and he was the father. She ended up with twins.

Ruth, a widow from Moab, showed relentless fidelity to her mother-in-law, her people and their God. Her devotion led Boaz to marry her and she gave birth to Obed, king David's grandfather.

The Bible is full of complex characters both within and outside Israel. Their stories help us define for ourselves what we admire and don't.

Identity is formed not just by what we say we want to be but also by what we say we don't want to be. You can't be Presbyterian **and** a Seventh-Day Adventist. If you try to be everything you end up being no-thing.

Jesus will tell his followers: "Don't be like the Gentiles." He will *also* reference with judgment those inside his tribe who are grandstanders and hypocrites.

But the overarching message from Jesus in helping people forge their identity is to see **all** identity as subsumed in our central identity as God's beloved. With *that* identity, you can follow his bold demands:

“You have heard it said ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”²

Don’t be *like* your enemies, but don’t harm them. How you treat your enemy is an indication of how well you know God. Don’t be like your enemies, who hurt their enemies!

To be who we want to be means defining who we don’t want to be. The Gospel has clear messaging in this regard: don’t be like the ones who pretend and show off; don’t be like the ones who ignore the weak or take advantage of others. Don’t be like the ones who elevate themselves. Don’t be like the ones who are all talk and no action. Don’t be like the ones who throw stones, unwilling to see their own failures. “Repent,” said John the Baptist, “Repent,” said Jesus, which is a way of saying, *change your mind*.

This Canaanite mother helped Jesus take his own advice! Don’t be like the ones who assume someone should not get a blessing just because their identity differs from your own. Don’t be like the ones who say your problem is not my problem.

The mother in our story had a very big problem on her hands. Her daughter was out of her mind. Her daughter was lost. So this mother crossed lines, she got into “good trouble,” she relentlessly pursued a way to get help. In so doing, she made her personal problem a universal demand - **no one is truly free until all are free**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

² Matthew 5:43