

Sermon Sept 5th, 2021

Jesus' Plan Is Adaptable

When Jesus comes to John to get baptized Jesus comes with a plan. A plan that we start to see unfold as his ministry takes hold in the region of Galilee. Jesus has come to heal the sick. Jesus has come to call people to repentance. Jesus has come to exorcise demons out of people. Jesus has come to preach good news to the poor. Jesus has come to reconnect the marginalized people with their communities. Jesus has come to give people a taste of God's kingdom. Jesus has come to do all these things for those in his own faith/ethnic community.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus declares that he has come for the lost people of Israel. In Mark's gospel, Jesus has come for the children. Whatever wording Jesus uses, up until this story we hear in our gospel today, Jesus' plan is to reach out to those in his own faith/ethnic community. That's it.

When he decides to retreat to a Gentile community. It isn't because he sees a need there, and wants to help. It is because he is trying to find some rest from all the people in his own faith/ethnic community who are begging him to help. Jesus believes that he will not be bothered if he stays in this community for a while. This way he can reenergize, and get back to work helping people in his own faith/ethnic community.

Well, for the first time in Jesus' ministry, he comes across a person in need who pushes him to change his plan. To Jesus' surprise, word has leaked out into the Gentile communities about his healing and miracles. Despite all his efforts to keep the people he heals silent.

A Gentile woman kneels before Jesus and begs him to save her daughter (**Image**).

Now Jesus' first response comes out rather defensive of his current plan. In fact, we have spent years as church leaders trying to justify his response. Jesus calls her a dog, which in those days meant, someone who is valued less in the community.

Unfortunately, there is such a systemic problem between Gentiles and Jews in the Empire that this influences how they see each other. People within the Jewish community see people within the Gentile community as no more important than a dog that needs to know their place at the table. And people in the Gentile community see people in the Jewish community in derogatory ways as well.

What is surprising to us is that Jesus could even be caught up in this systemic problem? Isn't Jesus the one to come fix the problems within the system?

To this day interpreters are perplexed on how to deal with what Jesus says to this Gentile woman.

With that being said, I want to now focus on the one thing that really sticks out for me in Jesus' reaction to the Gentile woman. Jesus' defensive comments come off sounding like his plan is very rigid. Not adaptable to the new situation that has come up. Jesus is making a strong argument to himself that his plan is to help those in his own community. And not reach outside of that. In a way contradicting his whole message of inclusivity.

On the Myers Briggs Personality Scale, I am what they call a strong J personality. Meaning my life is very plan orientated, and if something throws that plan off track my anxiety revs up. I get frustrated. Angry. Sometimes I have an adult temper tantrum **(Image)**. I don't know how to adapt very well to a change in plan.

Some of you may be asking, "and you became a pastor?" I know, it isn't easy being a J and being a pastor. I have really had to learn to challenge this part of my personality, as ministry is all about being able to adapt to changing situations.

But, if Jesus is having a little trouble adapting, then me having some trouble adapting doesn't sound so bad. Right?

Many of us can probably relate to Jesus here. We have a plan, and then something challenges this plan, and we react. Instead, of adapting to the situation. We have an outburst, or an anxiety attack, or we just get all flustered. Or we get stuck in our way, and try to force the plan through **(Image)**.

"This is going to work. I have put a lot of thought and effort into this plan. It is going to work." Even though we see that it is completely unrelatable to the current situation.

As the church, we have been revisioning what it means to be the church in our world for the past fifty years, as we have seen so much rapid change happen in our society. We go to restructuring meetings, and visioning meetings. We try to be creative. In the end, we come back with a plan that is very similar to our old plan. Maybe with a little glitter added to it.

I argue that as a community we can be less adaptable then as individuals. In fact, when we see creative change happen in a community, it is after some big break down in the current system in place. It takes a big social Kaboom to really engage people in change.

Well, this pandemic has been a big Kaboom on the life of community. In the church, we have had no choice but to adapt to changing times to stay relevant. We are walking in Gentile Land. Standing before the Gentile woman with an opportunity to adapt to these

changing times (**Image**). With an opportunity to do things differently. The million-dollar question is can we do things differently or will we revert back to what is comfortable?

In response to Jesus' comments, the Gentile woman doesn't argue with him or tell him where to go. The Gentile woman's main concern is for her daughter's health, and so, she turns the other cheek, and challenges him to share whatever is left over with her. Even the crumbs that fall from his table.

Since word has been travelling around the Gentile woman's community, she probably has heard about Jesus, and knows that there is a compassionate side of him. This Gentile woman will not be fooled by the systemic words that come out of his mouth. This Gentile woman believes deep in her heart that Jesus' compassion will be what wins in his heart, and that she will receive his gift of healing.

And she is right. Jesus changes his plan. Jesus adapts to his current situation, and heals her daughter. From this moment forward, Jesus' plan will include Gentiles.

In fact, the very next place Jesus will go is another Gentile territory where Jesus will heal a Gentile deaf and mute man.

This isn't a one-time thing. Jesus's plan has fundamentally shifted to include Gentiles. And it all started with a Gentile woman who found within herself the humility and strength to challenge Jesus to change his plan. To live up to his words about hospitality and inclusiveness.

As the church, we are standing in Jesus' shoes this morning. The pandemic has become a representation of this Gentile woman. The Indigenous community, and their trauma has become a representation of this Gentile woman (**Image**). The creation's groaning pains has become a representation of this Gentile woman (**Image**). The pleas of marginalized people in our community have become a representation of this Gentile woman. The mental health crises we find ourselves in has become a representation of this Gentile woman. The rapidly changing community that we have experienced over the past fifty years continues to be a representation of this Gentile woman. We are standing at a cross roads (**Image**). We have reacted like Jesus' first reaction many times in our history when confronted by the Gentile woman. Sometimes, we have adapted to change, as Jesus does when he heals the Gentile woman's daughter. Now as we hear these pleas for compassion from these representations of the Gentile woman in our context, can we now walk down the path Jesus walks down? Is our plan adaptable? Can we change our course to include everyone?

Jesus does. And this is why we, who come from Gentile origins, are gathered here today.

Let us pray, gracious God, our world is changing so rapidly, and we are struggling to keep up. Give us the patience, flexibility, and discernment to create visions and plans that are adaptable. Give us grace and hospitable hearts to be inclusive in our planning. Reaching out to those within and to those outside our faith/ethic communities. **Amen.**

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