

How do you help someone look at the world differently? How do you help someone to grow and change and accept new ideas?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament Prophecies. The gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus starting with Abraham, the father of Israel. Jesus is “the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Mt 1:1). Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” (Mt 1:23). “The announcement of the birth of this newborn king of the Jews greatly troubles not only King Herod but all Jerusalem (Mt 2:1–3), yet the Gentile magi are overjoyed to find him and offer him their homage and their gifts (Mt 2:10–11). Thus, his ultimate rejection by the mass of his own people and his acceptance by the Gentile nations is foreshadowed” (Introduction).

Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses. As an infant Moses’s mother gave him up and he was put in a basket to be retrieved and protected by Pharaoh’s daughter. The exile of the Holy Family to Egypt shows how Jesus is also threatened as an infant. Moses went up the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments. Jesus goes up the Mountain to teach the Beatitudes. Moses celebrates the first Passover. Jesus gives Passover a new meaning by celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Moses leads his people out of slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Jesus leads humanity out of slavery to sin and opens the gates of Eternity. Moses dies before reaching the Promised Land. Jesus who has risen from the dead, ascends to be with his Father in heaven, so the apostles will build the church.

The word Apostle means “one who is sent” (Note to Mt:10:2). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus commissions the Apostles to go out to the whole world and to share the Good News. The Israelite Community has given birth to the Messiah, but now the Christ child is to be taken to the entire world. Certainly, the Gospel writer Mathew would have seen an original hesitancy among Jewish Christians if not an outright refusal of the mission to the Gentiles. This may in fact express “the limitation that Jesus himself observed during his ministry” (Note to Matthew 10:5-6).

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Today’s Gospel is a pivotal turning point. Jesus at first will not help the Canaanite woman. He tells her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (21:24). This foreigner has faith in Jesus, and she presses on. Jesus uses more coarse language to echo the point a second time while testing the woman’s faith. “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs” (Mt 15:26). Reference to the “dogs” shows contempt for the Gentiles.

Let us keep in mind that Jesus is experiencing extreme contempt from the Pharisees and the scribes. Their hostility has only become more intense in the chapters leading to this pivot point in the Gospel. The rejection of Jesus is coming from Pharisees who will call for his death. “But they are not alone in their rejection. Jesus complains of the lack of faith of “this generation” of Israelites (Mt 11:16–19) and reproaches the towns ... for not heeding his call to repentance” (Introduction).

The Canaanite woman is not deterred, and she uses a little humor to defuse the situation. She has demonstrated her faith 3-fold and Jesus responds accordingly by commending her faith and healing her daughter. What can Jesus teach us about our own situation?

Some refer to society as a “Cancel Culture.” We appear to be at the edge of a cliff where intimidation rather than acceptance and understanding rule the day. The free exchange of ideas is

healthy for society. Instead, we are told “that truth isn’t a process of collective discovery, but an orthodoxy already known to an enlightened few whose job is to inform everyone else.” Comments online are often filled with violent attacks against others. Crowds pull down statues and are praised for their destructiveness rather than challenged to understand what they have destroyed. Amidst all of this negativity, we still “hunger for news that is accurate, opinions that are vital, and debate that is sincere.”<sup>i</sup>

“Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon” (MT 15:22). Certainly, the devil is sitting back and laughing at human folly. He has sown seeds of division and he can’t wait for us to rip each other apart. Like the Canaanite woman, we need the help of God to reign in the torment of the demon.

“The woman came and did him homage, saying, “Lord, help me” (10:25). More than ever, we need the help of the Lord. We are built for community. We need social discourse. We need one another. In a period with forced social isolation to stem the tide of the pandemic, all of our faults are more noticeable, and arguably, we are less patient with one another. Lord, forgive us our trespasses and help us to forgive one another.

“Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters” (15:27). Lord help our skin to be thick so that we may look past insults and look to the person who is created in your likeness and image. Help us to see the good and lift it up rather than to respond in hurt and anger. Help us to respond with faith, hope, and love.

How do you help someone look at the world differently? How do you help someone to grow and change and accept new ideas? Lord, show us the way.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bariweiss.com/resignation-letter>