

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



AUGUST 20, 2023

BORDERLAND

people live between our worlds

by Drew Downs

The great vision for the United States was that we would be a great "melting pot." A vision in which many different people could live together in one place. The phrase evokes a great homogenizing into a singular culture. But it also evokes another. A land without borders. No English state and French state with a line to separate.

When Jesus enter the borderlands, we can hardly understand what is happening.

We don't have borderlands. But they are the space between spaces. It isn't just a road or a river that makes a border. But "empty" land that buffers.

Borderlands are never empty, however. They are full of people who are cast out. Made refugees by war or cynical governments; by ill health or demonic possession; poverty or politics. Our division creates an entire ecosystem of the rejected.

ORDINARY TIME

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Moving Borders

This past Sunday, St. Stephen's received incredible hospitality from St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church as we joined them for their church picnic. Their kids were in the yard playing when we gathered with them after their service for hamburgers, hot dogs, casseroles, salads, fruit, and dessert. Not a soul walked away hungry. And like the disciples, many walked away with a basket full.

I was reminded of one of the core principles of the Faithful Innovations training I received back in 2018: let yourself be hosted.

As much as we like to be treated well in the general sense, we Christians *really* like hosting people. We like people to come to *our* place and we can treat *them* well. For many of us, it is a more comfortable place being in the kitchen rather than first in line to be served.

We actually have to learn how to be hosted. And because we prefer to host, we actually have to intentionally go and let someone else do that.

And it was in the being hosted that I was able to have a good conversation with their pastor, Terry Clark, about their neighborhood. How it is changing. Borders are moving. So are the demographics, populations, and expectations. None of this is ever truly permanent.

Lots of good conversation, opportunity, food, friendship, excitement, generosity, and in all of it, gratitude. Genuine gratitude.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2023

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 15A

August 20, 2023

Collect

GAlmighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

PENTECOST

Reflection

A woman comes to Jesus and convinces him to save her daughter from a demon. On the surface, this shouldn't be among the most controversial passages in the gospels. But it is one of the most deeply consequential.

Jesus has left the comfort of Hebrew territory for the borderlands. And this woman is a Canaanite. The people God tells Abraham's line to not consort with in Genesis. So it goes *all the way back*.

The woman shouts for help, the disciples try to stop it, she persists, Jesus insults her...the whole thing feels weird to us. It is so unlike the Jesus we know: who offers grace to *anyone* who comes to him. The battles of division were fought so long ago, and the universal love version of Jesus is so present to us. It feels like it's from *the before times*.

This is at the root of what makes it controversial. Because Jesus *is* insulting this woman. He *is* buying into the division. And he *is* changed by the woman's conviction. And a lot of people of faith find this whole thing just can't work. Except that it does. Beautifully.

As much as Jesus has been pushing others to see the holy in their midst—and to focus on what God is *actually* up to, not just what we want—he is confronted in a moment when he hasn't been doing the same. And she awakens an entirely new possibility.

The borders he has put between people just don't work.

As a preacher, I don't start with what "you" need to hear. I start with what startles *me* awake. And often, what comes out of it, is something I needed to hear. And I share it knowing that other people, like me, probably do too.

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