

Matthew 15: 21-28: Is This REALLY Jesus?

I'm not much into horror movies, but the plot from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* haunts me: When alien seed pods land on earth, people everywhere are terrified to discover that the very people they love and trust best are not who they seem to be. Their bodies have been hijacked by these alien seed pods – and they are now soulless, evil pod people with one goal: kill people so their likenesses can be used . Worse yet, these seed pods are creating pod people faster than we can kill them. Reading today's Gospel, made me think of this movie because at first glance, the Jesus of this story does not sound like the Jesus I know and trust. When a desperate Canaanite mother begs him to heal her daughter, Jesus is silent, distant, and when he finally deigns to speak, he is insulting. If this is the real Jesus, can I truly trust and love him?

But I do not think this story is meant to show us a cold, uncaring Jesus, there only for God's chosen people, Israel. In his actions, Jesus is exposing something in the disciples—and in us. The disciples are perfectly comfortable with sending this woman away. She is foreign, loud, inconvenient, and outside the boundaries Jews have honored for centuries. Jesus's initial response seems to confirm their response as correct.

When Jesus finally does respond, his dismissal of the woman's demands reinforces another cultural assumption: he is there to save only the Jewish people, God's chosen ones. He is *their* Messiah. The rest of the world will come to worship God and be saved only after Israel's glory and power are restored. But the woman persists. She acknowledges Jesus's point – but her response points out that even a crumb of mercy is worth asking for. And now, *finally*, we see the Jesus we know. The Jesus we love. Jesus honors the woman's faith, heals her daughter, and shows everyone watching that God's mercy crosses the boundaries we build so carefully.

We humans love our boundaries. They help us decide who is in and who is out, who belongs and who does not. But God is not limited by the lines we draw. God does not love one group more than another, and God's compassion is not reserved for the people we already understand or approve of. In this Gospel, Jesus turns the disciples' assumptions and boundaries upside down. He reminds us that persistent faith brings us into the healing presence of a God who hears, loves, and saves. Thanks be to God. Amen.