

“That Worst Side of us All”

Last week, I continued the study of the Enneagram – the diagnostic tool that Dr. Henry Selby introduced our parish to.

The Enneagram is an ancient Christian tool that opens the door for self-discovery.

I will not bore you with all of the details of my finding, (Ashley's suffered, already), but a universal insight of the Enneagram is that each person had a "stress" point or a place where they become their worse selves.

This is not groundbreaking info, but it is worth remembering that many times our best version of our selves or our strengths or gifts will lead to our "worse" selves, too

I.e., things that take away from your energy and bring out the worse self.

Now, no one really wants to talk about their worse selves, do they?

1. Because it's easier to talk about our friends or husbands or wives worse selves..."Stay away from him, today."
2. Its the place we want to hide from everyone

But, and I am not shattering anyone's actual knowledge, we all have these "worse selves" – many times it looks like anger, but it manifests as loathing, self-pity, or contrarianism, it's universal, but it manifests in each of us differently.

For Instance, some of us experience our, "worse self-comes when I am overextended and have given too much to others and neglected my own self-care..." -- not sure who I am talking about!?!

The above is an example of a "flashpoint" that creates the environment for my worse side.

Where are your flashpoints?

How about Jesus, Does He have a flash point? Does He have a worse self?

He does get mad, but that's part of the ministry, right, it's yelling at the corrupted powers and leaders.... In others words, He gets upset with those who deserve it -- religious authorities, the powers, and principalities.

Yet, we do not think about Him having a weak moment, except for maybe in the Garden when he is overcome with anguish, but again, that's individual, in his relationships and interactions, He is perfect.

Except for today.

Some context for our Gospel. He has been arguing and combatting with the Jews for weeks, now. He is a Jew, and He is challenging the authorities, Pharisees, and Sadducees, and healing the lame, lost and least. He's picked up a band of Jewish disciples, and His ministry is in full swing. The crowds have swollen and wherever He goes and whatever He does is in full display.

Whew. That would be exhausting. Have you ever felt like this? Ragged and stressed? That will usually bring out your worse self!

Need for a break: we all need them. Long before halftime meant fancy shows or expensive beers, it was designed for rest, to reset before the 2nd half.

What happens when you do not have the break?

What happens? "I can tell you what happens in our house – a whole lotta yelling..."

It's a place where we are prone to let our worst self out or when our worst side will take over.

Jesus' tired...He's ragged, and so He retreats far away from the action to a house where He must expect to rest. Yet, someone outside of the power structure, a cast-away, a Gentile finds Him. She is genuinely lame and lost and needs His healing power. Her Daughter is possessed by a demon. Not sure how they met or how she knows who he is, but clearly she has been searching for him.

He gets interrupted. And He handles it poorly. She asks for healing. He responds --

“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Wow. Did you catch that response?

“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Okay: The children are the Israelites, the people of God, and the Dogs are the Gentiles, those that are not welcome at God’s table.

The Greek for Dog even translate more diminutive, "as puppies – not cute ones, but helpless."

He has called the Woman, the Gentile Woman who is requesting healing for his daughter, a Dog.

Her response is grace filled. She honors the history of God’s people that began with the people of Isreal and she points to the expanding kingdom under Jesus where all are welcome at the table.

The woman responds: “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Boom: Jesus flips, He changes His tune 100% and heals the daughter.

The Episcopal theologian Barbara Brown Taylor describes the moment this way:
“You can almost hear the huge wheel of history turning as Jesus comes to a new understanding of who he is and what he has been called to do. ”The Syrophoenician woman’s faith and persistence teach him that God’s purpose for him “is bigger than he had imagined, that there is enough of him to go around.”

The interaction between the Syrophoenician Woman and Jesus isn’t designed to tell us that God has a bad day at the office, God doesn’t, but it illustrates another equally important truism: That Jesus is not just entirely god, but fully human, too – sharing the same characteristics as we do. Meaning in addition to being fully God, He is fully Human and as such to be human means he might not always say the “right” thing.

A friend sent me a wonderful quote last week:

If New Testament Christianity is to reappear today with its power and joy and courage, men must recapture the basic conviction that this is a Visited Planet. It is not enough to express formal belief in the "Incarnation" or in the "Divinity of Christ," the staggering truth must be accepted afresh--that in this vast, mysterious Universe, of which we are an almost infinitesimal part, the great Mystery, Whom we call God, **has visited our planet in Person.**

The Gospel today reminds us that this is not theoretical nor a Church dogma nor something with just recite, but the fact that Jesus is fully human is as true as our own beating hearts.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus knows us, because he was one of us, He's not imagining what we go through, or pretending that He knows – He's living it. He is a real person who even shows his weakness and changes his mind, showing us that God's grace is for all and that God's grace is applicable even for our worse selves. Imagine a God who has experienced the embarrassment of the worse self? That God, our God, then knows us, and accepts us not in our best form, but even in our worst form.

God's property is mercy and the Syrophencian Women reminds Jesus of this, today.

The *Prayer of Humble Access* was written in response to this Gospel encounter and it tells us that we are not worthy to receive the crumbs from God, yet, God's property is always to have Mercy and so we are in fact worthy to receive and to receive God's grace and love no matter how bad we have acted nor how terrible our worse self might be.

And so, in our worst selves we believe that we are not worthy of God's love, yet, the story today reminds us that God's grace is beyond any human imagination just like god becoming human is beyond our comprehension, yet it is the truest thing we will ever know.