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Love Moves

I was sitting at breakfast when someone came to me with verses of Scripture that they wanted to talk about. Surprised that those words were in there, they wanted an explanation. Sometimes scripture needs to be integrated. That can be the epitome of faithfulness. It wasn't-- but it could have been today's gospel. This whole text should make us uncomfortable.

He called her a dog. I wouldn't dare call him a deplorable (verbally). It *was* shocking to me. I live in Oak Park. I'm enlightened. Dare I say, *educated*.

This unnamed man sitting at the door of a grocery store far away from here told me to have a blessed day, just as he told dozens of others. It was innocuous. Yet, I can't get his face and those words out of my mind. It troubled me.

I often believe stereotypes about people. I assume things. I have preconceived judgements that cloud my vision. He was wearing a hat that has become politically super-charged in our hyper partisan culture. It was red.

Jesus says that what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. This is what defiles a person. This is one of the most convicting sentences in Scripture for me. Throughout my life there have been things I have said aloud, to myself, or I have wanted to say that reveal the extent of my own sinfulness.

Stuck in our own echo chambers and bubbles we are confident in our faith and suspicious of others. Firm in our convictions we see ourselves with nuance and complexity but we do not afford the same for others. We accept the labels that others have been given by this world and speak accordingly. They are lazy, misinformed, misguided, lost, or unlucky. People to be pitied we say-- with our voices or actions-- or inaction.

Jesus says all of this on the way to an encounter with an unnamed woman. A canaanite. Traveling to the district of Tyre and Sidon he comes face to face with her. An outsider. A gentile. If you haven't caught it --- the most disturbing thing about this story is what Jesus calls/names her. What comes out of his mouth. A slur. Something derogatory. A phrase that would make us cringe and rightfully so if we heard it spoken aloud today. A name that has been used for centuries to put people in their place especially when spoken by those in authority. A dog.

I could try to explain that this isn't what Jesus meant or it had a different meaning back then. Or the Greek/aramaic here is ambiguous. I won't. That would be disingenous/dishonest.

We would miss out on what surprises Jesus and causes him to change course. The transformation that seems to be occurring as the conversation unfolds. The truth at the heart of this perichope. The stunning faith of this woman who wasn't supposed to have any. A faith that eventually leaves Jesus in awe. See-- it is the risky, courageous and faithful stranger who stands at the center of this exchange. She speaks in the style of a psalm of lament and appeals to God's promises. This is meant to mess up our categories and question borders and boundaries-- real and imagined--- political and personal--- social and otherwise.

Isaiah proclaimed "my house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples."

Christ will move to the cross- cursed, defiled, outside the city, among criminals, derided by the people as his arms reach out far enough to embrace the cosmos. Three days later he will rise again. Ascended he is set loose to the right hand of God which Luther reminds us is not detached from this world but *everywhere*. Announcing forgiveness, mercy, and raising the dead to life. Grave broken open he fully embodies this love of the triune God. Love that reaches across the chasms of death. Stretching beyond all that seems final. Like those names that seem so permanent. Failure, sick, worthless, forgotten, workaholic, burden. He takes you by the hand. You are held and remembered. In this love even those things within yourself that seem foreign are honored. You are named: beloved. The name that will stick forever even as every other falls away. Joined to the Outsider we have died to all of the death dealing ways of this world that categorize, judge, label, sort and name ourselves and them. What does that death look like? That death is the gate to lasting life. In that lasting life we are free to love without an agenda and travel forward.

Where is Christ made flesh for you disguised as the unarmed woman? Who is she for you? In whom is Christ alive? Before whom should we bow even as we are tempted to curse them? The one who is alive is fully present, in word, meal, within these walls: and *there* too. Ever since he walked out of death he has been on the move. And the breadth of his travels can be disturbing. Yet Christ has come to you amid all the left for dead places in your life with the promise of resurrection. This love is wider than seems responsible or right to us and is for you and embraces you. This love that is stronger than every human distinction might disturb us or make us uncomfortable even as it is for you. Christ is your salvation.

Joined to this love we are freed to take the risk of traveling to those far away places in your heart and elsewhere. You know- where the geography is fraught or unfamiliar. Where there may be borders or boundaries. You might be scared to go there but God is at work. And God can be

trusted. How does Gerard Manley Hopkins put it? For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his.