



season of creation creation time creationtide

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The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith

Mark 7.24-37: Creation Time



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We know from history that relationships were strained between the Gentile Tyrians and the Jewish minority population living in this principal seaport; or in the Jewish villages that surrounded it, still deeply rooted in Jewish culture, who by economic pressure were forced to be the 'breadbas-

ket' for the city elite. This may explain the morally offensive language exchanged between Jesus and the Greek woman, by race a Syrophoenician, on the subject of 'dogs'; but whether the metaphor alludes to the stray scavenger kind or household pets, need not concern us here. It may have been a bit of banter, and there has been a lot of speculation. What we do know is that Jesus was staying at a house where he wanted no one to recognise him. Despite his best efforts, Jesus is confronted by a woman, who in Jewish eyes, was of a lesser pagan race and gender, and was part of the city's hated upper class. However, untrue to form, the woman has no concern about herself, only for her little daughter and in the encounter outsmarts Jesus in the argument that follows. The real moral issue here is that she is a mother who is suffering. She has a daughter possessed by a demon and one assumes has exhausted all the sources of help that her wealth can buy, so humbles herself at the feet of The Healer she has heard about. Evidently her faith in Jesus made her daughter whole, because Jesus learned a deeper truth about his ingrained prejudice and, moved by compassion, set his prejudice aside, and healed the child.

In the context of environmental justice, what is the deeper truth that we need to learn about our anthropocentric sense of privilege in relation to God's creation:

- Who or what ultimately qualifies as morally significant? Humankind made in the image of God or do all living things have moral status?
- How do you understand humankind's God-given 'dominion' over creation with the divine commission of Adam to 'till and keep'?
- If stray dogs have an intrinsic value independent of anyone, and puppies have an aesthetic value in being cute, and guide dogs have an instrumental value to blind people, how do you evaluate the moral worth of dogs? Should a distinction always be drawn, morally speaking, between what has a higher or lower worth to humankind?
- What of other living things? What about invasive species and their effect on whole ecosystems?
- Should the healing of God's creation be left to science, or can theology and spirituality be deployed to heal our 'common home'?