
Courage to Change Your Mind

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 15, Year A

Before I share this story with you, I need to tell you I have permission to share it. The person the story is about is not here today... she is worshipping at the parish where she was baptized six years ago. She is full of Holy Spirit fire and wonder and joy, and I love her even more than she loves to push my buttons. This person is, of course, my daughter.

This summer, my daughter came to me and said, "I want to get my ears pierced." I wasn't sure what prompted the announcement or how serious she was about it, so I used the pool as an excuse to hold off a few months, explaining her ears would need to heal after swim season was over.

She agreed with that logic and never argued, but also never wavered from her desire to get her ears pierced. She brought it up frequently, always with a bounce in her step and a twinkle in her eye. I became convinced this was truly her heart's desire.

Fast forward to the end of July when we always head to the grandparents' cottage on Lake Ontario for some quality time with aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. My niece, who is the same age as my daughter, had recently pierced her ears. These two girls are the best of friends despite living so far apart, so I asked my daughter if she'd like to go ahead and pierce her ears the last day of our trip and bring her cousin along. She was thrilled with the idea. We talked about what the process would be like, including the one-hour drive each way to Pittsford, NY, right outside of Rochester. Again and again my daughter insisted she was ready and eager to make the drive and take the leap into the world of pierced ears.

And so, on the appointed day, my mother-in-law, my niece, my daughter and I all piled into the car to Pittsford. We drove for an hour, arrived, and spent a few minutes picking out the earrings, which I then purchased. My daughter sat on a chair while we took turns inspecting little dots of marker on her ears to ensure proper placement. And then she sat in my lap with her cousin and grandma by her side. The time had come.

It was at this moment that my daughter started asking a lot of questions... and I mean a LOT of questions. The girl was clearly stalling. My mother-in-law would later tell me that I had the patience of Job, but I will tell you that I was feeling anything BUT patient.

Finally, I looked at my watch and said, "We've got an hour drive ahead of us and dinner will be ready soon. You either get your ears pierced now, or we've got to go without."

Needless to say, my daughter still does not have pierced ears. She cried when we left, but soon fell asleep in the car, exhausted from the whole ordeal. When we got home, she woke up in tears, not wanting to enter the house with nothing to show for all her excited talk.

So I knelt down, held her in my arms, and told her that yes I was upset that we had driven all that way and spent all that money, but that I was not at all upset with her for changing her mind. I told her, it's never too late to change your mind.

And when she finally looked me in the eye I said, "It takes courage to change your mind."

In today's very uncomfortable Gospel text, Jesus changes his mind.

And again I am left thinking, it takes courage to change your mind.

First it took courage on the part of the Canaanite woman, who introduces Jesus to the tenacity of a mother desperate to care for her suffering child. She will not be talked down or talked down to. She insists on speaking up for her daughter who cannot speak for herself. If you've been following along in our Sunday School class on the Enneagram, you might recognize this woman as a classic Eight.

I am grateful for the courage of the Canaanite woman.

But Jesus shows courage too. Can you imagine being the person known for always saying the right thing, for always showing the better way, for always imparting wisdom, for always proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and then being told by a stranger and a "foreigner" that you've got it wrong this time... and you've got it wrong because there's actually more than enough love to go around, more than enough Good News, more than enough redemption and healing.

Jesus hears this woman's insistence for *more* and discovers the invitation her words present—an invitation to expand God's love and God's presence and God's work in the world beyond what Jesus thought he knew.

I imagine Jesus was recalling all the stories of God he had learned as a child, including stories of God changing the divine mind. You know... that time Abraham argued with God and changed the mind of God not to smite the entire city of Sodom. Or that time Moses argued with God and changed the mind of God to practice just a little more patience with the Israelites. Or that time God decided flooding the earth wasn't the best idea and put a rainbow in the sky as a reminder.

Jesus had so many examples of God changing the divine mind—and every time for the sake of expanding love and mercy. I imagine those stories gave Jesus the courage he needed to change his own mind for the sake of growing the Kingdom of God.

Because there is more than enough to go around. The hymn we just sang reminds us that *the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind*. And that means that sometimes we too are called to change our minds.

We who are created in the image of God, we who are followers of Jesus, we too must change our minds for the sake of more love, more mercy, more Good News.

It sounds as if "more love" would be the easiest thing in the world, but sometimes the invitation to love more can be a challenge.

It can challenge what we thought we knew about one thing or another. It can challenge our view of the world, or our view of the Kingdom of God. It can challenge our comfort zones and our relationships with friends and strangers.

And part of the challenge is that we're often surrounded by people that think just like us! We go out to dinner with people who like to talk about the same things we like to talk about. We read books by people who think like we do. We listen or watch news stations that adhere to our worldview. It can be hard to change your mind when everyone around you is like-minded.

But friends, there is one place you can go where you are guaranteed to encounter people who think differently than you do... Church! This church is one such place! And thank God that it is!

When you walk through the doors of the Cathedral of St. Philip, you pass by the words we heard today from the prophet Isaiah: *For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*.

And it is! This is truly a house of prayer for all peoples. Go to a Bible study, or join a Foyers group, or volunteer with the youth, or sing in the choir, and you know what you'll find? Someone who thinks differently than you do. Pass the peace with someone near you, and you know what you've done? Made peace with someone you disagree with.

The beauty of this place is that it is truly a house of prayer for all peoples.

So keep coming to church. And get to know the people around you. Sooner or later, you too just might have the courage to speak up like the Canaanite woman, or the courage to change your mind like Jesus.

And when you do, the Kingdom of God will expand. Amen.

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