

## THE CANAANITE WOMAN

*The idea for this conversation between Jesus and Peter came from the 'Off-the record conversations Jesus and Peter' by John Bell and Graham Maule (Glasgow: Wild Goose Pub), 1999; it is inspired by a story from the Gospels, Mark 7 v 24-30 and Matthew 15 v 21-28; and was written by Yvonne Naylor for the publication 'Moving beyond Sectarianism' (Belfast: Irish School of Ecumenics), 2001, pp 157-158.*

PETER: Jesus

JESUS: Yes, Peter

PETER: Jesus, that woman had a nerve didn't she? Screaming after us for you to help her out with her wee girl - typical Canaanite! We wanted to send her away for there's nothing you can do for the likes of her. And she was making a right scene.

JESUS: Yes, I tried ignoring her but it didn't work did it?

PETER: Jesus she's a Canaanite. She's not one of us. You should have sent her away like we said, crying after us like that.

JESUS: Can you remember what I did say Peter?

PETER: Yes, you said quite rightly that you were sent only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus you have to focus on your mission here. You can't be helping every Tom Dick and Harry or you'll never get round your own people.

JESUS: You would have to admit though Peter that woman had endurance and faith, kneeling down at my feet and asking me again to help her.

PETER: You didn't think that when you referred to her and her sort as 'dogs' did you?

JESUS: To think that I nearly gave that troubled woman the brush off. She reminded me of a truth that in any order of things everyone has a place even the 'dogs'.

PETER: Jesus, are you telling me that that woman taught you something? Is that why you healed her daughter? Did you not resent even a wee bit being taught a 'truth' by a 'dog'?

JESUS: Peter, would there have been any point in the word becoming flesh if there was nothing to learn from that experience? I heard the word of truth from the unexpected. I recognized the light of faith in an unexpected quarter. I listened, I heard, I looked and I saw. Life is a journey Peter and all of us who 'journey' must be prepared to learn from those we might least expect to learn from.

PETER: So are you saying that 'outsiders' are part of God's plan for the peace of the whole world? Do we have to cross borders and be prepared to learn from those of a different tradition? Are you encouraging the search for unexpected grace?

JESUS: You're a quick learner Peter.

## CLASS WORK AND DISCUSSION

### METHOD

- Read the story of the Canaanite woman from Matthew 15 v 21-28
- In talking partners share your feelings after reading this story. Would you describe Jesus' actions/words to her, after her repeated requests for him to heal her daughter, inclusive or exclusive? How would you describe her feelings/reaction to Jesus' words and actions?
- Feedback - Each of the talking partners can feedback some of what they have shared to the rest of the class.
- Class discussion might focus on any of the following:-
  - What does the story teach us about inclusion and exclusion; assumptions and prejudice; identity and belonging?
  - What does the woman's reaction to Jesus tell us about positive identity; endurance; and faith?
  - What can we learn from this story about positive/reconciling ways of dealing with inclusion and exclusion; assumptions and prejudice?
- Invite 2 members of the class to read out the parts of Jesus and Peter in the Conversation, The Canaanite Woman
  - What do you think the disciples thought about what they had seen/heard?
  - How does this story challenge us as followers of Jesus; other faith traditions or none?