

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, yr. a, 8-16-2020  
Genesis 45:1-15; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28  
Filling God's Shoes – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks  
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When you were little did you ever put on your dad's or mom's shoes and try to walk around in them? It's like we wanted to try being "grown up" on for size. Why? It really was kind of an act of imagination ... seeing ourselves as we could be, as we aspired to be, desired to be. Grown up like our parents. But then there are those moments when life happens, when something disturbs our imagining of our best grown up selves.

I remember when I was little how I longed more than anything to be old enough to go to the 5 and 10 cents store, by myself. To go to the 5 and 10 meant walking three long city blocks and then crossing a busy street. It seemed as if I had to wait a very long time to be allowed to do this. Finally, FINALLY, when I was old enough, my parents allowed me to go by myself. It was thrilling, a little scary, wonderful feeling to turn the corner of our street, walk three blocks, wait for the light to turn green, cross the busy street, and walk through the doors of the store, BY MYSELF. It seemed as if, suddenly, my parents' oversized shoes fit me. And the very best thing about it was that my younger sister and brothers were not old enough yet to do what I could do.

But then something unexpected, terrible happened. My parents asked me to take my sister and brothers with me. I was not pleased. I just didn't think it was fair or right that a privilege for which I had waited so long, a privilege which I

felt I had in some way earned by showing myself to be so “grown up”, was so freely extended to my younger siblings. (Never mind that they still couldn’t go by themselves.) Now that I had finally grown up enough to have some measure of independence, I now had to take responsibility for others.

How do we deal with the tension – the conflict – that arises between our ardent desires, our self-understanding and the demands and expectations of others – or the world around us? The tension and conflict that separates, distorts, distinguishes ... nurtures resentment and even hatred.

We see these tensions and conflicts in our scripture readings. In Genesis we see the grown up Joseph, now a member of Pharaoh’s household, encountering his brothers who long ago had sold him into slavery out of jealousy. In his Letter to the Romans we see Paul struggling to reconcile his familial, primary identity as an Israelite, part of God’s Covenant with the descendants of Abraham, with the call of God in Christ that Gentiles are also part of God’s Covenant. And in Matthew’s Gospel we see Jesus himself struggling to see God’s healing and reconciling love as extending beyond his own people.

Reconciliation ... redemption ... healing & wholeness. These are words that express our deepest desires for ourselves, for those whom we love ... that are at the heart of what we know God’s desire for us to be. They are words that contain for us how God works in our lives ... works in the lives of others. But they

are words in tension with other words, the shadow side of our desires ... revenge  
... retribution ... judgment

In seeking to live fruitful, meaningful, good lives, we wrestle with this tension – this conflict ... throughout human history and in our own lives our tendency is to wrestles the tensions, the conflict, to an uneasy truce ...

- Reconciliation ... redemption ... healing & wholeness for us, those like us, those near & dear
- Revenge ... retribution ... judgment for those who do us wrong, those not like us – embodying all that we are fearful of

But this truce is fundamentally unsatisfying, unfulfilling, because it keeps us divided. And our fearfulness can erupt into piling hurt upon hurt ... harm upon harm ... until all we are left with is at the very least a kind of wariness, or actually seeking revenge and retribution, and the belief that that if we are right then someone else has to be wrong; and so making reconciliation and redemption seem impossible.

I find myself wondering, asking – How does God do it? How does God continue to love us and love those we don't. How is it God is so patient with us, that God doesn't just ... give up? We find God at work in the midst of our messes and bad choices. What God's love, God's redemption, really means is not simply making right, but making whole ... forgiving and reconciling.

Have you ever notice how nothing is ever really resolved in the Bible, but God keep on moving in, with and through people? Look at Jesus and the Canaanite woman. It's almost as if we see right before our eyes Jesus trying on God's shoes ...

I have always associated this encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman with a prayer from my childhood growing up in the Episcopal church. It is was called THE PRAYER OF HUMBLE ACCESS, said before we went up for Communion.

“We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.”

“We do not presume ...” Letting go of our presumption ... much like God let's go of presumption so as not to foreclose any possibility of redemption, reconciliation, healing. This is how God does it ... how and why God never gives up on us, on all humanity. Humility meeting mercy even in midst of all our

messes and bad choices ... in the midst of the tension between reconciliation & revenge; redemption & judgment; healing & retribution.

It is hard for us to accept that we need help. Every fiber of our “grown up” being resists the notion that we are in need of God’s mercy, that we are “too little” to make it on our own. Like those religious authorities, the Pharisees, we distinguish ourselves by our identity as God’s faithful people, not realizing how much we reject others simply by making such distinctions. How much we reject others simply because they fall outside our rules and definitions of what is right and proper and normal. Like the disciples, we may pride ourselves in how much we give and give and give again of ourselves, not realizing how much we make others dependent on our giving. Like the Pharisees and the disciples, we find it difficult to acknowledge that we too need God’s love and mercy. In our trying so hard to be “grown up” and be independent, we forget how to receive. We forget how to be a child of God, dependent on God for our well - being.

I think we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the Canaanite woman and walk around in them for awhile. As an outsider, a dependent woman and a Gentile, she grasps what the insiders - the Pharisees and the disciples - cannot perceive; that all people, regardless of who they are, need God’s saving mercy, and that saving mercy is offered to all. The Canaanite woman is a person free of all pretension. She knows she is “little.” She is willing to accept not only that she is in need, but that others like her daughter need her to give of herself - give to

the point of embarrassment and confrontation - so that their needs may be acknowledged and mercifully met.

Walking around in the Canaanite woman's shoes, we discover that to live under God's mercy as a child of God means we need to embody both giving and receiving - to be grown up enough to embrace both the freedom and the responsibility of what God has given us. It means having the daring, just like the Canaanite woman, to put ourselves in God's shoes, and walking around in God's oversized shoes, to realize that God makes no distinction, no separation between human beings. It means realizing that there really is no separation between God and us. Because after all, when we truly try on God's mercy for size, we soon come to realize that God, in God's unfathomable mercy, has already put on our shoes and walked around in them in his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

