

05 September – 11 September 2021

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

Most of us who are reading this have access to technology that qualifies us as, at the very least, "middle class." This can make talking about God's passionate concern for the poor more than a little uncomfortable. Part of the problem is that we tend to frame the conversation in either/or terms. If God is "on the side" of the poor, then God must be "against" the wealthy. Or, if God "blesses" the wealthy, then God must be "punishing" the poor. There are theologians on both sides of this debate, and, as long as we keep viewing things this way, the debate is not going to end soon.

But the Scriptures do not really enter this debate at all. There is no question that God loves and welcomes whoever seeks relationship with God. There is also no question that God seeks justice wherever there is injustice – which means that where people suffer God will send prophets and activists to work for healing, restoration, and transformation. The challenge for us is to learn to share God's passion for the poor, and to become more and more comfortable with the tough conversations around bringing justice into our world.

One thing we cannot avoid, if we are serious about following Christ in our daily lives, is becoming involved in God's work of justice and compassion. What this might mean for us practically is part of this week's journey.

**SUNDAY 05 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**Read:** Mark 7:24-37

**Reflect:** Today's reading is a tough one. The way Jesus treats the woman in this story seems most uncharacteristic, and really quite rude. She is a Gentile, and at first Jesus refers to her as a dog! There are a number of different ways to interpret this response. Some feel that Jesus was testing her to see whether she had the

faith to stick to her guns. Some feel that Jesus was pretending to treat her badly to highlight the racism of his own people. Others believe that Jesus had a transforming moment where this woman made him realise that his mission was not just to the Jews. Whatever we may believe about this encounter, what becomes clear is that Jesus finally welcomes this poor, Gentile woman and heals her daughter. After this, he then returns to a Jewish region and heals a deaf-mute man. It seems pretty clear that the Gospel writer wants us to recognise that Jesus was radically inclusive in his ministry.

The problem with injustice is that it always includes some and excludes others. This means that one of the most powerful things we can do to bring about justice in our world is to become radically inclusive like Jesus.

Who do you need to welcome and include today?

**Do:** Being inclusive doesn't mean that we have to be close friends with everyone - that just isn’t humanly possible. But, if we treat everyone we meet with kindness and respect, and take time to recognise their basic humanity, we are living as welcoming, inclusive Christ-followers. Try it today.

**Pray:** Help me to recognise the humanity, and the divine image, in everyone I meet, O God.