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Deep and Wide and Tall
(Matthew 15:21-28)

Closed Doors

The magazine *Time Out Paris* advertises a nightclub called Le Baron. That's French for, well, The Baron. Le Baron has discovered that the secret to being a top nightspot in a city filled with nightclubs competing for business is to be extremely exclusive.

To that end, Le Baron limits its to 150 people. And those 150 people aren't just anyone, mind you, but 150 of the most fabulous socialites, fashionistas, and celebrities. When they turned me away this summer I assume it was because I was number 151. I didn't bother asking.

There are times when doors are closed to us and we say "no big deal" and move on. Then there are times when the only response to a closed door is to push it wide open.

Today the Gospel story tells us about a Gentile woman with a sick daughter hears that Jesus is nearby and seeks him out. She calls Jesus "Son of David," which indicates her belief that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus explains "Look, you made a mistake. You're a Gentile and I'm here on a rather focused mission, specifically for the children of Abraham, the Jews. But thanks for stopping by." In fact, he isn't even that polite about it, suggesting that if he were to begin ministering to the Gentiles, it would be like throwing food to the dogs.

But the woman doesn't say "No big deal" and walk on. Her daughter's affliction has made her desperate and picking up on Jesus' metaphor, showing abject humility or guts, maybe both, says "at least the dogs get the crumbs."

The Bible tells us that Jesus came to bring the abundant life and so instead of crumbs, he gives to the Gentile woman as he has given to us, the fulfillment of the promises made throughout the Old Testament, the greatest of which is: God is our God and we are God's people.

This is an exclamation point story in the Bible. It is one that is meant to grab our attention, to teach us something. The very fact of this conversation is shocking: someone is demanding something from God. A woman in a patriarchal society is approaching a

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man who is not her husband, a Gentile approaching a Jew. But the result of this conversation is even more shocking: world reconciled with its God.

If God's Love is Limitless...

Years later, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the reconciliation of the Jewish and Gentile communities, brought together as the Christian church. Almost unimaginable at one time, now an uneasy reality: not for God, but for the people.

In his letter, Paul told the Gentiles that through Christ, God has broken down the laws and barriers that kept them from the promises made to the Jewish people so many years ago, making them fellow heirs, brothers and sisters in the Christian community.

God's love surpasses understanding. Paul writes of his hope that the Ephesians would truly understand "what is the breadth and length and height and depth [of] Christ's love," (Ephesians 3:18-19).

...Then Why Try to Limit It?

The Christian community, in a time when it needs to be an example, is still somewhat of an uneasy reality.

God's love is expansive enough to cover all people and yet the body of Christ remains a divided one. Its people have divided themselves according to denomination and doctrine, interpretation and tradition. In 2005 Christians of all kinds even debate the issue of who to include into their families, as if they had some say over whom God loves.

It is as if the way to make the Good News of Jesus Christ more desirable to our world relies on it being limited to a certain number of people of a certain quality.

But the matter of God's love is not political or denominational. It is transformational, relational and that is it. The challenge of the church is to facilitate the relationship and the transformation, rather than get in its way.

After all, Peter may have been given the keys to the church, but Christ is the cornerstone. There is no denying the love of God to any human being, no matter who they are or where they've been.

Spread the Word, Open the Doors

Jesus was impressed by the faith of the Gentile woman and it changed history. Whether God intended it all along or this grassroots lobbyist gets the credit, we have become adopted children of Abraham. The church is not sullied by God's decision to include all people. God's love is not diluted because it is shared by all people. As the woman ran to Jesus for salvation, we now run from him to share news of that salvation.

The debates and discussions in the churches continue. To the churches that haven't found peace, may God guide you. Forget the meetings, the studies, the votes, just open the doors. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, after all, means trusting that God can handle the work of transforming hearts and souls.

To the churches that have: keep going, keep reaching, scour the corners of this for everybody to show God's love to whether it is a community or an individual and then let them through the door. Keep asking: who is the neighbor it is hard for me to love?

Deep and Wide and Tall

Does it go without saying that you are welcome in the Christian community? Sometimes we welcome others, tell them of God's love for them, tell them they are forgiven, but we don't always believe it for ourselves.

God knows and loves you. Does it seem hard to believe, do you think that God's love is too limited to include you? Does it seem as though doors are closed to you?

Enoch walked with God and God spoke to Moses as friends speak to each other, but nothing compares with the relationship between God and David. Yet even David, the shepherd given strength by God to slay Goliath, the least likely person to become ruler over Israel, but who turned out to be arguably its greatest king, the person whose sins in the face of God were so improbably forgiven, had questions

In one of the Psalms attributed to him, David asks, in light of everything in this magnificent world "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:5) David does not give an answer because ultimately God's love for us is a mystery. It is a mystery in so many ways, including the fact that God first loved us and the fact that we have tested that love and are still loved.

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Who can explain God's love? No one. Then who can place limits and boundaries on how God chooses to love? No one.

God's love is deep, it's wide, and it's tall. Let that be the good news we bring to this world and even to ourselves.