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And this is where the woman finds him. She's Syrophenician, which is a long word that, in this story, simply means "not Jewish." She comes asking for help, but Jesus isn't interested. He's helped Gentile people before, but right now, he's off the clock. Maybe it's dealing with the constant, infuriating hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the legalism of the scribes, or maybe it's the stress of constantly having to explain things to his dense disciples, or maybe it's just the frustration of being interrupted while trying to take a break, but Jesus gets curt. He gets more than curt. He gets abusive.

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And, perhaps just as astonishingly, the woman takes Jesus' insult and verbally redirects it to her own advantage. There's only one person in the gospels who does this, and who is, in fact,

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God, on the other hand, knows when to change their mind. God haggles with Abraham over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, God decides not to destroy Israel in the wilderness when Moses reminds them about the promise they made to Abraham, God relents from punishing Nineveh when the people heed Jonah's message. Whenever God does change their mind, it is always for mercy; and that is what Jesus does in this story.

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Perhaps Jesus is able to grow because he knows a God who grows, who can change and adapt and evolve. In that growth there is freedom; not only freedom to fail, but freedom to succeed. Because he is able to let go of what he knows to be right in order to be opened to what is true, he is able to meet God in a new way.

If this is true, then perhaps we need to rethink what we know about our own righteousness. If our call is to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect," maybe that so-called perfection is not in being without flaw, but in always being able to grow. Maybe being "godly" is less a destination than a journey; perhaps it is in that journey that we find God rather than in some state of being good. Maybe it is in those moments when we think we have arrived, that we have attained some sort of goodness or moral uprightness or principled position, that we are actually furthest from God because we have lost the incentive to keep moving, to keep growing.

When I know that I am right, when I know that God is on my side and on the side of my principles and convictions and that I have nowhere else to grow, nothing else to learn, I wonder if that is when I am most Pharisaic, most susceptible to seeing other people as dogs and ignoring what they may have to teach me.

This is a healing story, and when the evangelists tell healing stories, physical healing is often the least important thing going on. Perhaps this story less about the healing of the woman's daughter or the man who cannot hear or speak as it is about the healing of Jesus. When the woman confronts his belief in his own superiority, God's Beloved Son recognizes God in in a face he never expected, in the face of God's Beloved Daughter. I wonder if this isn't the place we can see God in the story; not in the rude and abrasive Jesus, but in the way Jesus has his experience of God expanded and his prejudice healed.

Personally, I am reassured by the fact that even Jesus needs healing, because that means that I can see him in myself not just when I am fighting for justice or standing up for what is right, but also when I am accepting correction, when I learn to see God more fully in the face of another, even an opponent. I'm grateful that, in those moments of my greatest weakness, God is not far away because Jesus himself has been where I am.

A God who repents, who not only heals but also needs healing, is a God in whom there is room for me. It means that when I am confronted with my own pride, my own arrogance, my own blindness, I don't have to be ashamed of falling short; in that God, I am free to let go of what holds me back to become what God is calling me to be. When I can't be perfect, when I make mistakes, I can remember that God is not found in unattainable perfection, but in the loving help I receive to grow. A God who repents teaches me how to repent; a God who needs healing, teaches me how to be healed.

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