

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year, A  
Edward Foley

**Lectionary 118:**

Isa 55:1, 6-7  
Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8  
Rom 11:13-15, 29-32  
Matt 15:21-28

**Possible preaching themes:**

- **The value and danger of the stranger** (connected to the first reading, psalm and Gospel)
- **Mission as a call to travel outside our comfort zones** (across the readings and psalm)
- **Parenting as vocation** (connected to the gospel)

**Possible scientific resources:**

- **Encountering the stranger**
  - Mona Sue Weissmark has written an important book on *The Science of Diversity*.
    - Here is a [quick overview](#) of the book
    - As well as an [extended YouTube interview](#) with her
  - This is a short article explaining the nature of [implicit bias](#)
  - Evidence from a variety of disciplines suggests that [interacting with strangers](#) can make us wiser and happier
  - David Berreby's TED talk on "Us and Them"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EdqxIR\\_w8A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EdqxIR_w8A)
- **The psychological benefits of travel**
  - An easy ready on four reasons why [travel improves your mental health](#)
  - A touching [narrative](#) about how travel can help people process grief, trauma and anxiety
  - A [Harvard Business Review](#) article about the benefits of vacationing somewhere new
  - An accessible article on the [psychology of travel](#)
- **The Power of Parenting**

- Brief overview of the importance of parents to young children from the Center for Disease Control
- A scholarly article reporting a study on the roles of a protective factor and risk factor on parenting styles for adolescent mental health.
- A short article explaining what makes a mother risk her life for her kids from a neuroscience perspective
- A 3 minute video of how mothers protect, nurture and raise their young in the animal kingdom

### **Homily outline combining resources:**

- **Jesus off his game**

- The gospels consistently cast Jesus as the good guy, the shepherd, teacher, healer and comforter
- This section in Matthew reveals a different, much more human side of Jesus
  - While the church teaches that Jesus is truly God and truly Human, we are less comfortable with this display of humanity
- Jesus almost comes across as mean in this passage
  - scholars have tried to clean up this story, for example, by suggesting that Jesus was testing this woman to see if she had enough faith
  - When she passed the test, Jesus commends her great faith and the daughter is healed
  - Ironically, the woman here makes no confession of faith
  - She is persistent recognizing Jesus as a healer or magician but shows no evidence of believing that he was the son of God
  - Others have suggested that the word for dogs (*kunarios*) actually means puppies, but not sure that helps
- Contextually what is new for Jesus here is that he is geographically outside of his home territory
  - He has left his homeland of Galilee and is now in Gentile country
  - Tyre and Sidon are the furthest north that the Gospels depict Jesus traveling
  - Furthermore, he is interpersonally traveling into the sphere of a Canaanite mother, fiercely fighting for her daughter's life.

- **The Promise and Problem of travel**

- Multiple mental health professionals believe that travel can contribute to our wellbeing
- According to some it can lift your mood, lower the risk of depression and even reset your sleep clock if you are missing out on slumber
- Travel's value increases the more we immerse ourselves in the experience, or as the travel adage notes "Travelers see what they see, Tourists see what they have come to see"
- If we travel to a foreign place, stay in an "American" style hotel with all the amenities, and frequent McDonald's and Starbucks we are less apt to be changed, and our creativity is less apt to be boosted

- Being adventuresome in our travel (even getting lost!) is more apt to put us in contact with strangers that can lower some of our biases about “them” and lead us to unexpected experiences and even new wisdom
- **Jesus is changed**
  - More than virtually any other gospel passage, today’s reveals a Jesus who makes a radical change
  - His encounter with this fierce mother, summoning every passion and rhetorical skill for the sake of her child, has him doing a 180-degree turn
  - While the Canaanite woman is not risking her physical life, she is risking public judgment and humiliation in confronting this powerful teacher in a public forum
  - We sometime forget that the Son of God also takes multiple risks in his public interchanges with lepers and Samaritans, Pharisees and protective mothers
  - Yet, Jesus is not diminished by this encounter
  - Rather, it provides an interesting path for growing in wisdom and grace.
- **Canaanite lives matter**
  - Christianity is not meant to be a gathering of the elite, nor an insular community
  - Pope Francis notably calls all of us to be missionary disciples
  - That doesn’t require journeying into foreign lands but it does require that we are spiritual venturers
  - Willing to travel outside of our comfort zones
    - Encounter the stranger
    - The passionate other protecting their families and their livelihoods
    - And allow them to change us
  - While every life matters the Black Lives Matter movement shed new light on the violence and systematic racism towards Black People
  - Analogously, there are other groups that we easily dismiss, and even relegate to the “dog” status Jesus surprising evokes in today’s gospel
  - Jesus learned that Canaanite lives matter, he changed, he grew, he traveled further into his own humanity which revealed even further the beauty of his divinity
  - In his spirit, we can change as well

**Tags:** change, motherhood, psychology, strangers, travel

### **About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient

teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.