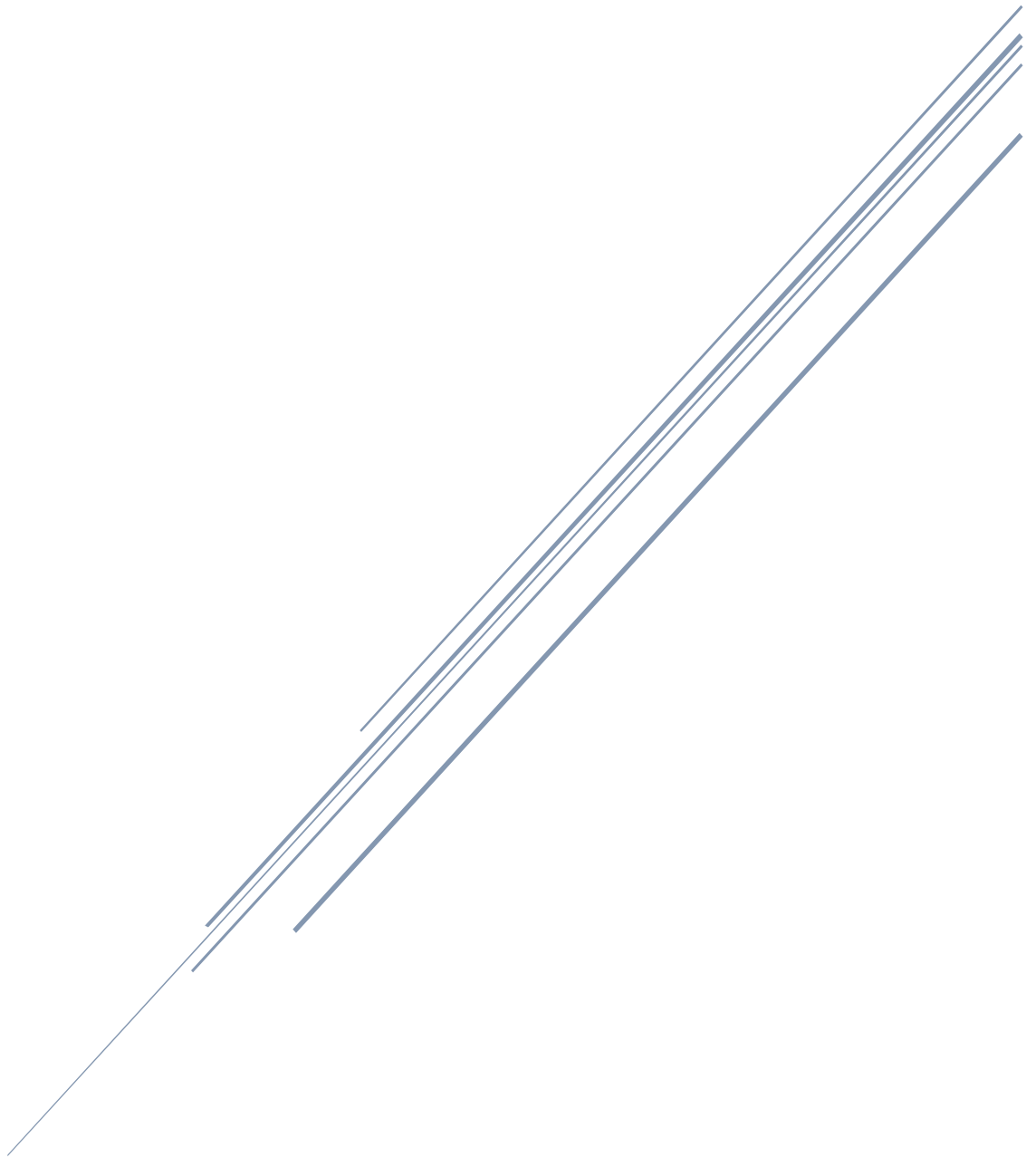


# **The Significance of Jesus' Pause in Matthew 15:21-28.**

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## **“Not even a word”: The Significance of Jesus’ Pause in Matthew 15:21-28.**

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## Section 1: Introduction and Scope of Study

The story of the Canaanite woman, marginalised through gender, class, ethnicity and her daughter's disability (labelled "demon possession" in the narrative), has been given liberative re-telling by women interpreters and those reading through the eyes of the marginalised. The woman approaches Jesus and pleads, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon," (v22, NRSV). Jesus "did not answer her at all" (v 23). The disciples intervene asking him to send her away. This pause intrigues me. I am interested in this initial silence of Jesus and the impact it may have had on the woman. Why did Jesus pause? How have interpreters explained this pause? How did they (the woman and the disciples) interpret this pause? Few seem to have adequately attended to this pause, this initial silence on Jesus' part in response to the woman's plea.

This response can be heard in different ways and may hold profound meaning for those who experience marginalisation, in this instance through disability. I am particularly interested in the response of those who suffer. Might Jesus' silence be interpreted as analogous to contemporary institutional silence?

I am the mother of a son born with a disability. In identifying with the story, I am Justa (the name tradition gives the Canaanite woman),<sup>1</sup> and I will reflect on my own story alongside this narrative and ask further questions of this pause/silence and Jesus' response to the woman. Silence itself communicates and I will ask how my own experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine M. Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 46; The names are traced back to Pseudo-Clementine Epistles and tell of further aspects of their lives following this narrative; Laura E. Donaldson, "Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of New Testament Criticism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Stephen D. Moore, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 100. Accessed August 13, 2021, Pro Quest eBook Central; Also Louise J. Lawrence, "Crumb trails and puppy-dog tales: Reading afterlives of a Canaanite woman," in *From the Margins: Women of the New Testament and their afterlives*, eds. Peter S. Hawkins, Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 270.

silence, and the story of other women who have experienced institutional silence might allow us to hear differently in the intersection with Jesus' silence in this story.

My interest is in the sound of women's suffering and how contemporary women experience silence. I bring the contemporary woman, through my own story, into conversation with Matthew 15:21- 28, rehearsing the narrative through a feminist voice. The focus will be on Jesus' initial response to the plea of the woman, the silence described with the sentence, "But he did not answer her at all." (NRSV). How are we to understand this pause in communication? What impact might it have had for this woman, marginalised by gender, ethnicity and class, and by her experience of being the mother of a child with disability? How might it impact contemporary women in similar circumstances, particularly those marginalised through their experience of disability?

Three main questions drive this project:

Can Jesus' silence be interpreted as analogous to contemporary institutional silence?

How might Jesus' silence speak to marginalised contemporary women who have experienced institutional silence?

In the conversation between Jesus and the woman, might there be an opportunity to explore the ways in which contemporary women respond to the silence?

## **1.1 Scope of the Study**

While my identification with Justa allows me to engage deeply, I acknowledge the limits of this identification. Her levels of marginalisation are profound, and her daughter is even more marginalised. I witness her pain and her suffering in the aching experience of powerlessness and frustration in encountering the silence of the Divine. I hear her bond with her child amidst the struggle to fully embrace wholeness in their relationship. I

acknowledge however, my bias as a Christian woman from the dominant culture who holds white, feminist theological views and who is privileged through education and status. While I have experience of disability, I am able-bodied. I am appropriating the story of Justa for my own purposes, and I note that Justa herself may have told it very differently to the narrator's version. I hope to explore it respectfully but acknowledge the part my own perspective will play.

I am using the Matthean version of the text as the Markan version does not explicitly mention the silence. I will not pursue the reasons for this in depth, except to set some context for the Matthean story.<sup>2</sup> I preference Matthew's version because the plight of the woman is nuanced differently through mention of her cultural identity. I will show that Matthew's reference to her as a Canaanite intensifies her marginalisation around her socio-economic status and experience of colonisation.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned previously, the woman has been named 'Justa' and her daughter 'Berenice,' by Wainwright and others. I will use their names extensively in order to give them greater presence.<sup>4</sup> The speech and silence of women, and the presence or absence of their names, serves as a critique to patriarchy and empire, and is "another significant analytical code".<sup>5</sup> While I will discuss the impacts of silence in this narrative, the scale of my

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<sup>2</sup> Wainwright addresses this more fully than the limits of my own study will allow, including chiasmic structure and the meaning of the pericope in its narrative setting. She particularly addresses this in; Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading*, 219; and in Elaine Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 86.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), 200, Accessed July 5, 2021. ProQuest eBook Central; Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 14/19, <http://search.ebscohost.com.divinity.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=509199&site=eds-live>

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Wainwright, "A Voice from the Margin: Reading Matthew 15:21-28 in an Australian Feminist Key," in *Reading from this Place, Vol. 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, eds. Fernando F. Segovia & Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1891/5663 (Kindle edition).

<sup>5</sup> Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading*, 46.

study limits delving more deeply into further stories of Biblical women characters who experience Divine absence or silence.

The text describes the daughter's condition variously as "demon possession" (NRSV) and "vexed with a devil" (KJB). I will briefly explore the description of her suffering and its relevance to disability more generally. Deeper analysis of the nature of the daughter's illness, however, is outside the focus of this study. Various theories around the meaning of 'demon possession' have been put forward. Martin argues that the reference here to demon possession would be more suitably referred to as "serious illness", as this is its general use.<sup>6</sup> While I will not directly address specific interpretations of demon possession in the New Testament, I will adopt the view that the suffering here results in some form of disability, likely affecting Berenice physically and mentally. I choose to use the term "disability" despite my misgivings, as all alternatives have their limitations. The contested nature of this term is too broad for discussion here. The approach I will take is to acknowledge there is a continuum of ability in all people and sometimes it is the label that places limitations.

While motherhood issues will be discussed, only those pertaining to the relevant themes which emerge from this passage will be included. Although I will not be addressing broader issues around mothering, this story speaks to motherhood in many ways.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hugh Martin, "Jesus and the Gentile Dogs," *The Christian World Pulpit* 122 (Nov 17, 1932): 232, cited in Nancy Klancher. *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman: Constructions of Christian Identity in the Afterlife of Matthew 15:21-28*. Studies of the Bible and Its Reception (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 110, <http://search.ebscohost.com.divinity.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=661760&site=eds-live>,

<sup>7</sup> Wainwright views the idealisation of the image of Mary as mother as a further way to marginalise women. The pain of mothers who sit in the tension of crying babies and of mothers who have mistreated or murdered their own children is sensitively explored in Wainwright, "A Voice from the Margin", loc 1948/5663.

I will utilise different perspectives to view the text and then propose some insights from my own experience, particularly as it pertains to the silence.

## **Section 2: Methodology and Hermeneutics: Feminist, Intersectional, Imaginative**

The Gospel of Matthew has been subject to enquiry with the use of varied methodologies, both traditional and creative, from varied perspectives.<sup>8</sup> My approach in this study is influenced largely by the creative and the imaginative approach used by feminist scholars. Imaginative methods require other creative mediums to enable the inhabiting of the lived story of the narrative. A view through a performative lens for example, will examine “rhetorical performances”, the lines written for the characters, which mediate the text through enacting, even ventriloquising.<sup>9</sup> I will therefore explore some creative approaches to Justa’s story and the reflections which result from adopting them.

My approach in the re-reading of the Matthean passage will be feminist although definitions of feminism vary. Here I use Sarah Coakley, who defines it as an approach which is “committed to overcoming economic, cultural, societal, or psychological disadvantages”,<sup>10</sup> particularly as it pertains to women, but I encompass all those oppressed by patriarchal systems.

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<sup>8</sup> Elaine Wainwright et al., *Matthew: an introduction and study guide: Basileia of the heavens is near at hand* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), contains differing hermeneutical frameworks for reading Matthew including Queer Hermeneutics (54) and Post-Colonial Hermeneutics (57). She tracks the exegetical history and the various hermeneutical approaches, showing the Matthean sources (using a Markan priority, along with ‘Q’ and possibly ‘M’) and suggestions for dating and authorship.

<sup>9</sup> Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 251, 252.

<sup>10</sup> *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 347.

With Gale Yee I would argue that feminism functions best intersectionally, paying attention to the impact of “multiple interacting systems of oppression and privilege”.<sup>11</sup> Inequities are revealed in the interconnection of processes and forms of “privilege and oppression” based around gender, race, indigeneity, sexual orientation, “ableism and patriarchy”. By adopting an intersectional approach, different “social locations, power relations and experiences” can be exposed.<sup>12</sup> Examining “the diverse power relations of inequality in the text” enables the voice of the silenced and the subjugated to be heard.<sup>13</sup>

Using this method to view the text will give space for the recontextualising of the Biblical narrative and open up a “critical spiraling dance of interpretation”, rather than a closed circle which confines interpretation to a traditionalist agenda.<sup>14</sup> Historical readings of the narrative have used a “factual, objectivist and antiquarian framework” in the attempt to recover the text as the first hearers would have heard it.<sup>15</sup> The degree to which this was seen to be achieved was the “measure of its correct interpretation”.<sup>16</sup> Describing these standard methods of interpretation as “helpful but not necessary”, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that various feminist critical methods can be employed to read text and undo the “mechanisms of domination and alienation” in a “multi strategy” approach.<sup>17</sup>

The various methods of interpretation can be described as “dance steps.” A reconstructive approach recognises that while the Biblical text has been used to colonise and dominate, it has also empowered and inspired movements of justice and “radical

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<sup>11</sup> Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline." *JBL* 139, no. 1 (2020): 7-26. Accessed August 25, 2021. doi:10.15699/jbl.1391.2020.1b.

<sup>12</sup> Olena Hankivsky, *Intersectionality 101* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: The Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, Simon Fraser University, 2014): 2.

<sup>13</sup> Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally", 7.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 166.

<sup>15</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence, "Crumb trails", 267.

<sup>17</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 135.



equality” when “correctly” understood.<sup>18</sup> All text is contextual, and an original “pristine” form of the Biblical text can never be fully recovered. However, reviewing text in a different “socio-political-religious historical context” reveals the potential visibility and agency of those who are marginalised. No single hermeneutical approach is sufficient to deeply hear the revelation of God, and Schüssler Fiorenza advocates use of “imaginative reconstruction”, of images, role-plays, storytelling, of “inhabiting” characters<sup>19</sup>, in exploring reactions and emotions.<sup>20</sup> This range of tools and techniques make up the “Imaginative Interpretive Method” which utilises a “feminist reconstructive approach”.<sup>21</sup>

I will read Matt 15:21-28 from the perspective of “the silenced”, retelling the story from the marginalised rather than the dominant position. The Canaanite woman has been silenced intersectionally by her race, gender, class and being the mother of child with disability. I will read this passage consciously from a woman’s perspective using the “Imaginative Interpretive Methods” as defined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. By creatively engaging with the story, I will enter its world through “personal identification” with Justa from the perspective of a woman and mother of a disabled son<sup>22</sup>.

My approach will be to explore some of the current thinking on this passage. To this end, I will engage feminist scholars who have analysed and reflected upon this text and Justa’s response.

Through engagement with this text and my own story, I hope to offer insights into the silence, especially as it pertains to the marginalized, and expand our understanding of how

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<sup>18</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 136 and 165. In the chapter entitled “Wisdom’s Dance: Hermeneutical Moves and Turns” on liberative feminist frameworks, she argues that the Biblical text is “always engaged for or against the oppressed”.

<sup>19</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 111, refers to being “haunted” by them.

<sup>20</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 145, 148.

<sup>21</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 148.

<sup>22</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 148.

God is met and received within the silence. Is the silence a transformational space and if so how and for whom?

### **Section 3: Feminist Reflections on the Text**

Having discussed the approach I will adopt in examining the significance of the silence, I will now review some of the perspectives offered in relation to this passage, and some insights derived from the innovative approaches adopted by others. I will reflect on the story of the Canaanite women through feminist voices using a “different key”, firstly setting the story into its context in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>23</sup> Accepting the story’s enticing invitation to enter the text “imaginatively”,<sup>24</sup> I will explore the challenge *Justa* presents,<sup>25</sup> by breaking the confines imposed on her story through traditional exegesis. The text’s rich texture and vitality lie in reading the narrative “against the grain” and “against the androcentric register”,<sup>26</sup> and I will cross boundaries, utilising new images and dialogues in the effort to move from patriarchal perspectives into new ways of hearing.<sup>27</sup>

#### **3.1 Some Context**

Traditional interpretations of the text are “discordant” in their resonance and inadequate to fully encompass mainstream perspectives, demonstrating a relatively narrow focus.<sup>28</sup> At worst, when this story has been reduced to reinforcement of doctrinal arguments it has settled into “certain grooves” which have served to boost “power and

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<sup>23</sup> Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15.21-28): narrative, theology, ministry,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 13, no. 1 (May 2015): 19.

<sup>25</sup> I note again before I begin this exercise, that *Justa* has had her story appropriated and was given no choice in the role she is given.

<sup>26</sup> Wainwright, “A Voice from the Margin”, 134.

<sup>27</sup> Wainwright, “A Voice from the Margin”, 1964/5663 (Kindle edition).

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 262.

prejudice” and exclusion.<sup>29</sup> Presenting a precis on the interpretation of this story by “church fathers” and “Reformers”, Lawrence mourns this loss of the “transformative power” of the story in its depiction of love bursting through the borders.<sup>30</sup> When it is reduced to discussions around “salvation-historical concerns” and the legitimation of the “status quo”, the story loses its rich texture.<sup>31</sup>

The motivation behind Jesus’ silence and hesitation has largely been understood as a test or as a means to “bolster” Justa’s faith.<sup>32</sup> Justa has been relegated to a character representing the exemplar of faithful Christian womanhood. She is the embodiment of the “reconstituted people of God”, in a repetition of age-old patterns of interpretation.<sup>33</sup> She is seen as either an oppressed victim or “heroic transgressor” of the boundaries.<sup>34</sup> I suggest she represents elements of both, held together in a tension around who represents the ‘other’ and how they are regarded.<sup>35</sup>

Exploring feminist writing on the passage, Scott’s observation on the “tortured nature” of the more “apologetic”, conservative interpretations seems accurate,<sup>36</sup> but he goes further to argue that, historically speaking, literature discussing either Gospel’s version of the story is not plentiful.<sup>37</sup> Wainwright notes that the passage has been given much scholarly exegesis but is less studied by feminists than its Markan counterpart.<sup>38</sup> Gullotta

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<sup>29</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 269.

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 262.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 262.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 263.

<sup>33</sup> L. J. Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel with Deaf Culture,” in *Matthew: Texts @ Contexts Series*, eds. Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James F. Grimshaw (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 262, eBook.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel,” 262.

<sup>35</sup> Anita Monro, “Alterity and the Canaanite Woman: A Postmodern Feminist Theological Reflection on Political Action,” *Colloquium* 26, no. 1 (May 1994): 32-43.

<sup>36</sup> J. Martin C. Scott, “Matthew 15:21-28: A Test-Case for Jesus’ Manners,” *JSNT* 19, no. 63 (Jan 1997): 27. Scott describes modern attempts to psychologise the intentions behind the story as a “well-worn dodge” and describes attempts to explain it as “gymnastics”, 23, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Wainwright, *Shall we look*, 84.

also argues that this passage has received much scholarly exegesis and interpretation and has been utilised in many ways, attempting to fathom its “harsh” and “dismissive” tone.<sup>39</sup> Interest in this story has increased, particularly in exploring it through diverse means and perspectives.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Form and Structure

This passage is a “rhetorical tour de force”<sup>41</sup>, and has been labelled a “controversy dialogue”,<sup>42</sup> a psalm and a prayer,<sup>43</sup> a “challenge-and-riposte interaction” and the “embodiment of a lament psalm”.<sup>44</sup> Lee, Mel, and Jackson, refer to its “ask and refusal” dialogue,<sup>45</sup> with Mel locating it as one of fourteen healing miracles in Matthew.<sup>46</sup>

The placement of the Canaanite woman story’s signals a “turning point” in the chiasmic structure of Matthew’s gospel, situated between two “feeding stories”, which in turn links it to healing stories.<sup>47</sup> Wainwright uses the terms “axis” and “watershed,” terms that Lawrence also uses while affirming Justa’s place in the very heart of the Gospel and of the debate.<sup>48</sup> Justa is at the “axis point” of the story and the story is the “axis point” in its placement in the Gospel, a chiasmic structure within a chiasmic structure.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples: An Examination of the Story of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28) and the Question of the Gentile Mission within the Matthean Community,” *Neotestamentica* 48, (2014): 325.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel S. Chipani, “Transformation in the Borderlands: A Study of Matthew 15:21-28,” *Vision* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 13.

<sup>41</sup> Kim Tae Sub, “The Canaanite Woman's Story (Mt 15:21-28) and Its Implication for the Gentile Mission,” *신약논단* 23, no. 2 (Sum 2016): 266.

<sup>42</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Melanie S. Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite woman: a story of reversal,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 16, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Deb Beatty Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman: An Exception for Exceptional Faith,” *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 4 (2009): 8.

<sup>47</sup> Elaine M. Wainwright, “Of Dogs and Women: Ethology and Gender in Ancient Healing,” in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality*, eds., Stefan Alkier, and Annette Weissenrieder (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2013), 56. Accessed September 20, 2021. ProQuest eBook Central.

<sup>48</sup> Wainwright, “A Voice from the Margin,” 1822/5663 (eBook). Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 268.

<sup>49</sup> Wainwright, “Of Dogs and Women”, 56.

Various rhetorical devices include the anonymity of the women, role reversals between Jesus and Justa, and between the Jewish leaders and Justa regarding faith and status.<sup>50</sup> Referring to Justa's story as a "girder" of the building of the gospel, Jackson explores the narrative using photo imagery with a wide and a narrow lens.<sup>51</sup> Lee and Cadwallader bring us back to the founding structure, the core of the story being an exorcism.<sup>52</sup>

Wainwright entices us by dropping in a fanciful question about whether this can be considered a miracle story.<sup>53</sup> Lawrence hints at the anthemic nature of the story in its pro-Gentile, anti-Jewish polemic, giving it the quality of pantomime with the Jewish leaders as "'boo' characters".<sup>54</sup> The story loses its shape through appropriation in doctrines and debates of worthiness, beginning and ending with the Jewish-Gentile debate, but Justa remains at its heart.<sup>55</sup> The story seems to circle around the relationships and the characters and then back again as it builds its tensions toward its word of conclusive blessing. The story spirals on, functioning as a signpost and touchstone in the path climbing toward Matthew's culmination in its universal missional agenda.

### **3.3 Matthew's Redaction of the Markan Text<sup>56</sup>**

Exploring aspects of the context of the story brings the 'pause' into greater focus. Not present in the Markan version, yet strongly present in Matthew's gospel, the addition of the pause may give hints on its meaning.

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<sup>50</sup> Baffes, "Jesus and the Canaanite woman", 17.

<sup>51</sup> Glenna S. Jackson, "A Source for Matthew's Story of the Canaanite Woman," *Proceedings* 14 (1994): 48.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, "The faith of the Canaanite woman", 5.

<sup>53</sup> I note the work being done by Kylie Crabbe around miracle stories and their mixed reception by those with disability. UCA VicTas Synod Bible Study, 27 February 2021, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-\\_0xQQMn8Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-_0xQQMn8Q)

<sup>54</sup> Lawrence, "Reading Matthew's Gospel", 268, 269.

<sup>55</sup> Lawrence, "Reading Matthew's Gospel", 268.

<sup>56</sup> Mark 7:24-30.

Matthew's use of the Markan material can be seen as key in understanding his interpretive agenda. Wainwright has written extensively on the Matthean sources and the hermeneutical approaches the author employs.<sup>57</sup> I would argue that the structure of the Matthean redaction is very different from Mark's version for the purposes of heightening its drama and its tensions. The implied author of Matthew adds subtle details such as direct speech between the characters, the severity of the suffering of the women, a change to the location, an increase in the intensity of the demonic wickedness, and the desperate need for redemption inherent in this foreign woman's story.<sup>58</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew has been labelled a "Jewish Gospel", written for a Jewish audience.<sup>59</sup> A proper reading of it stands against both "anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism" attitudes.<sup>60</sup> It highlights Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets, made clear in the genealogical links which associate Jesus with the most prominent of Jewish ancestry and establishing him as the "Son of David".<sup>61</sup> Radically, the genealogy also includes women, four of them "sinners" and four of them "foreigners".<sup>62</sup> Despite patriarchal social "realities", women are given "extraordinary" inclusion throughout the Gospel, as are children.<sup>63</sup> Cullinan highlights the way Matthew uses the available sources to tell the story and she highlights the "unique" genealogy of Jesus at the very beginning of the Gospel.<sup>64</sup> Unexpected women characters are included, particularly those who take subversive, boundary crossing actions which make them "protagonists of history".<sup>65</sup> These are subtle

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<sup>57</sup> Wainwright et al., *Matthew: an introduction*.

<sup>58</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations*, 148.

<sup>59</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Colleen Carpenter Cullinan, *Redeeming the Story: Women, Suffering and Christ* (New York, Continuum: 2004), 126.

<sup>65</sup> Cullinan, *Redeeming the Story*, 127.

clues that the Christian story may disrupt and reshape the ongoing story of the covenantal relationship between Israel and God with radical inclusion of those previously considered 'other'.<sup>66</sup>

Matthew's Gospel affirms Jesus as Messiah, and his teaching, his life, and ministry, are emphasised.<sup>67</sup> The common people are given priority over political and religious leaders which is indicative of the radical inclusion of this Gospel challenging definitions of greatness and service.<sup>68</sup> With subversive undercurrents and an underlying resistance to empire, the ministry of Jesus at the margins is both "standpoint" and focus, re-evaluating what is 'other', "insider and outsider".<sup>69</sup>

The early church was in transition, competing for power over "the crowds", and for favour from the empire, these divisions themselves serving the Empire in its subjugation of the colonised peoples.<sup>70</sup> In crisis from a failed rebellion and the destruction of the Temple, Jewish Christians held concerns about the fracturing of the traditions and diluting Jewish "purity" culture through the inclusion of Gentiles.<sup>71</sup> Not only are the people to whom Jesus ministers on the margins, so also is Matthew's community. This text makes clear that the margins are an ideal "standpoint" from which to minister.<sup>72</sup>

I will explore two of the most significant changes in Matthew's redaction, use of the term 'Canaanite' and the Gentile mission, and review the two dominant images, dogs and bread.

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<sup>66</sup> Cullinan, *Redeeming the Story*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 9, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 16, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Donald Senior, "Invitation to Matthew," in Donald Senior, et al., *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 13/370 <https://search-ebscohost-com.divinity.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=url,ip,cookie,uid&db=nlebk&AN=2666950&site=ehost-live>; Also Case-Winters, *A Theological Commentary*, 3, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Case-Winters, *A Theological Commentary*, 8, 9.

### 3.4 The “Canaanite”

Matthew’s redaction of the Markan narrative heightens the drama and the inherent tensions in the story, particularly the racial tensions in the use of the term ‘Canaanite’. An author uses language to meet a desired agenda and Matthew’s use of “Canaanite”, rather than Mark’s “Syro-Phoenician”, indicates something of his intention to intensify the harshness of the narrative and the sullen demeanour of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> This alteration categorises the woman and exacerbates the cultural divide, and its inclusion has been extensively commented on by most who reflect on the story through a feminist lens. The word appears only here in the New Testament,<sup>74</sup> and Donaldson links it to the term “charam”, a “devotion to destruction”, referring to the edict by Yahweh to annihilate the Canaanite people who originally inhabited the land in taking over full possession.<sup>75</sup>

Cadwallader refers to the “genocidal” overtones heard in the label ‘Canaanite’,<sup>76</sup> a word invoking erasure of whole peoples.<sup>77</sup> The switch to “Canaanite” is a potent one, full of meaning and innuendo, and it summons images of sworn enemies and traditional prejudices.<sup>78</sup> Dube points to Matthew’s choice of ‘Canaanite’, over ‘Syro-Phoenician’, as setting up from the beginning, the colonising and subjugation of unequal subjects implied in the Great Commission.<sup>79</sup> Engaging with the term “intertextually” positions this woman as one who can be “invaded, conquered, annihilated”.<sup>80</sup> Gullotta however, suggests that the

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<sup>73</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 27.

<sup>74</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings,” 104.

<sup>76</sup> Alan H. Cadwallader, “Surprised by faith: a centurion and a Canaanite query the limits of Jesus and the disciples,” In Alan Cadwallader, *Pieces of Ease and Grace: Biblical Essays on Sexuality and Welcome* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2013), 86.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, footnote 268.

<sup>78</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 147, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 147.



inclusion of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute in Matthew's genealogy lifts "dramatic tension" by making Justa both ""other" and "kin"", both ""enemy" and "family"". <sup>81</sup> Alexander goes further in imagining Jesus already present in the womb of the Canaanite prostitute before the conquest of Canaan even occurred. <sup>82</sup> In an interesting juxtaposition, Cadwallader discusses the sexualised, promiscuous aspects of the image of Justa calling loudly in public spaces. <sup>83</sup> This woman, whose very identity calls up images of conquering and subjugation, may well have been put in a category which caused her to be blamed for her daughter's affliction. <sup>84</sup>

Matthew's redactions, the addition of the silent pause and his use of the term "Canaanite", alert us to his motivations. His heightening of the hostility toward Justa demonises her and makes her representative of total 'otherness', yet she also belongs in this place and could be said to represent Jesus' own kin. What are we being alerted to here? My conclusion is that the 'other' is present in every person, yet nobody is truly or fully 'other'.

### 3.5 Mission to the Gentiles

The story speaks to Matthew's agenda on mission to the Gentiles, though opinions regarding its message differ widely. Noting Jesus' Gentile (even "Canaanite") <sup>85</sup> heritage through Rahab in the opening verses of Matthew and concluding with the universal demand

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Monro, "Alterity", 7, argues that Justa has been considered dangerous through being "sexually aggressive". Cadwallader, "Surprised by faith", 91, 92, explores associations between "Canaanite" and the term "harlot" because of Justa's public call.

<sup>81</sup> Gullotta, "Among Dogs and Disciples", 330, 331. While others have also seen links with Rahab, I reference these only in direct relation to my own argument.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Alexander, "Raced, gendered, faithed, and sexed," *Pneuma* 35, no. 3 (2013): 330, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-12341364>.

<sup>83</sup> Cadwallader, "Surprised by faith", 90-92.

<sup>84</sup> Cadwallader, "Surprised by faith", 92. Cadwallader refers to this "primary" relationship between mother and daughter as "same-sex" and briefly notes its possible connotations.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander, "Raced", 321.

to take the gospel into all the nations, Matthew is arguably redefining mission in terms of inclusion of the Gentiles.<sup>86</sup>

Kim proposes that the narrative could demonstrate the shift from Jewish to Gentile mission, the harshness in its tone perhaps serving to highlight the restrictive boundaries around the exclusively Jewish mission, but also suggesting that the conservative Jews in the Matthean community would have found the harshness appealing and legitimating in its exclusive tone.<sup>87</sup> However, the dramatic turning point clarifies the shift to Gentile mission, made to provoke the Jewish conservatives to imitate Jesus.<sup>88</sup>

In using very different hermeneutical lenses, Gullotta and Jackson arrive at different views regarding the Gentile mission. Gullotta's argument convinces me that the finer details in Matthew's redaction, and use of terms such as "Canaanite", further exclude Gentiles unless they demonstrate exceptional faith.<sup>89</sup> Jackson argues against any hint of an anti-Jewish polemic suggesting that any focus on the Gentile mission risks missing the vital points.<sup>90</sup> I accept Jackson's suggestion that the "folktale" of Ruth has likely been written specifically to proselytise Gentiles and her claim that the narrative pattern in Matthew's text further reveals the agenda of Jewish proselytism.<sup>91</sup> She makes a compelling argument that the presence of this trope indicates that Matthew's author is re-enforcing a Jewish agenda of Gentile proselytism, while ruling out any inherently anti-Jewish agenda.<sup>92</sup> The Matthean Jesus' mission is expanded in this narrative to include the Gentiles, permitted now to eat the

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<sup>86</sup> Ofelia Alvarez, "Bible Study--Matthew 15:21-28." *Ministerial Formation* (Jan 1998): 12; also Lawrence, "Crumb trails", 268; Scott, "Matthew", 27; and Mel, "Jesus and the Canaanite Woman", 8.

<sup>87</sup> Tae Sub Kim. "The Canaanite Woman's Story", 265, 284.

<sup>88</sup> Kim, "The Canaanite Woman's Story", 285, 287.

<sup>89</sup> Gullotta, "Among Dogs and Disciples", 330.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson, "A Source", 48.

<sup>91</sup> Jackson, "A Source", 50.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, "A Source", 53.

crumbs from under the table and setting the scene for the universal mission to all the nations at the conclusion of the Gospel.<sup>93</sup>

Dube is convincing in her argument that Matthew's author had an agenda in alignment with empire tactically hidden throughout the gospel in his nuancing of Mark's material.<sup>94</sup> The additions of direct speech that Matthew makes to the narration style of the encounter in Mark, heighten the "ideology" of those in desperate need of foreign "redeemers".<sup>95</sup>

I note here that Guardiola-Sáenz describes the "oppressive" "ideology of chosenness", which diminishes Matthew's concept of the *basileia*, the Reign of God.<sup>96</sup> Justa re-defines the concept, however, in asserting her belief that the *basileia* includes her and dispossessed others like her.

### 3.6 Dogs and Bread

Two images particularly stand out in the perspectives of most feminist interpreters as vital to any interpretation of the text, namely, the language and imagery of dogs, and that of bread. The language is harsh and distressing and I agree with Scott's scathing statements rejecting any notion that Jesus emerges from the language of insult in this "offensive story" without himself being denigrated.<sup>97</sup> Jesus' bad manners in knowingly using such a term and his lack of contrition are inexcusable, opines Scott, while still wondering whether they serve as a plot device.<sup>98</sup> Others state differing views on Jesus' behaviour. Myers for example, tries

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<sup>93</sup> Lawrence, "Crumb trails", 268, 270.

<sup>94</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 148.

<sup>95</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 148.

<sup>96</sup> Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21-28." *Semeia* 78 (1997): 73, fn 2.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, "Matthew", 25, 27.

<sup>98</sup> Scott, "Matthew", 27.

to justify it as a “strategy”,<sup>99</sup> as it also provides evidence of Jesus’ willingness to change.<sup>100</sup> Some try to excuse it due to the impingement of the Canaanite woman on Jesus’ recuperation from a busy and intense schedule,<sup>101</sup> while others hold the belief that Jesus is not disrespectful at all, and downplay its seriousness with the use of terms such as “apparently callous” and ‘appearing’ to “demean” her.<sup>102</sup> Lyons-Pardue resists the “problematic reading” that spiritualises the narrative or absolves Jesus from his initial response.<sup>103</sup> The imagery is stark with Justa kneeling before Jesus in supplication, likening her to a submissive dog.<sup>104</sup> Most, though not all, involved in the interpretation of this passage view the use of the term ‘dog’ as insulting, its function supporting Jewish superiority while demeaning her by reducing her to animal status. Mel is unconvinced about the disrespect in the term, arguing that Justa is “happy” to accept the “lesser status” in order to be part of the household.<sup>105</sup> Lyons-Pardue’s argument is ambiguous, seeing no reason to consider the term an insult at one point but, in calling for “interpretive vigilance”, she refers to it as “inflammatory and defamatory” at another.<sup>106</sup> Tamez refers to it as a “serious insult” which she says is a reference to pagans,<sup>107</sup> and Scott can find no redeeming reason at all for Jesus’ use of such a term.<sup>108</sup> Lyons-Pardue wonders if this is an “interpretive

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<sup>99</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Alvarez, “Bible Study”, 14.

<sup>101</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 24, 25.

<sup>102</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”.

<sup>103</sup> Kara J. Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophenician Becomes a Canaanite: Jesus Exegetes the Canaanite Woman in Matthew,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (2019): 249, 240.

<sup>104</sup> Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples”, 334.

<sup>105</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophenician Woman”, 239, 244. She links the dog image to Jezebel in 2 Kings, who was eaten by dogs, 248. She questions whether the term is commonly used against Gentiles and whether it is gender or race based. I also note Wainwright, “Of Dogs and Women”, 67, describing dogs as healing agents.

<sup>107</sup> Elsa Tamez, “Bible study: the Canaanite -- Matthew 15:21-28” *Reformed World* 67, no. 2 (2017): 57.

<sup>108</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 43.

encounter”, that Jesus could be evaluating Justa through echoes of the story of the “wicked gentile queen” Jezebel being eaten by dogs.<sup>109</sup>

I reject any connection between women and dogs as metaphor, therefore Lee’s reference to it as an “everyday metaphor”, and the suggestion that Justa accepts the “metaphor on its own terms”.<sup>110</sup> Others have attempted to domesticate the image and softened it to mean “puppies”.<sup>111</sup> Lawrence and Ellsworth-Moran even adopt this terminology, although Lawrence adopts it as an “evocative image”, noting its jarring nature.<sup>112</sup> Gullotta makes use of the argument that Justa turns a negative image into a positive one.<sup>113</sup> First, Justa must acknowledge her place beneath the table in order to access the crumbs which fall. While her “witty reply” may be the punchline of the narrative, the question remains whether the woman accepts this insult to her ethnicity and status.<sup>114</sup> Dube refers to Justa’s tacit unquestioning acceptance of the insult, but in relation to her persistence in simply not giving up. It is when Justa accepts this “social category” that her request is granted.<sup>115</sup>

Guardiola-Sáenz however, argues strongly against Justa’s acceptance of this insult. The term “dog” invites consideration of the language of ‘insider/outsider’ and uncleanliness. While dogs are “unclean”, they are also accepted within the home and family. The relationship between the dogs and the children is recognised by Justa and is the point from which she argues her humanity. In stark contrast to Guardiola-Sáenz, Mel states that Justa is

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<sup>109</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophoenician Woman”, 247.

<sup>110</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples”, 333, discusses the unconvincing nature of this.

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 269; Nadine Ellsworth-Moran. “Between Text and Sermon: Matthew 15:21-28,” *Interpretation* 71, no. 3 (2017): 313-315.

<sup>113</sup> Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples”, 334.

<sup>114</sup> Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples”, 334.

<sup>115</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 150.

“happy to accept a lesser status” so that she can find inclusion in the “household”.<sup>116</sup> France dubs it a “robust refusal” to accept Jesus’ insult, redirecting Jesus’ parable back onto him.<sup>117</sup> Wainwright argues that it is Justa’s acceptance of the category that, while refusing “insider and outsider” dichotomies,<sup>118</sup> opens a space for her within the “House of Israel”.<sup>119</sup> While she may appear to accept the insult, Justa refuses to “be coerced by the politics of submission”, and it is in her marginality and vulnerability that she takes a stand against injustice.<sup>120</sup> Dickerson however, challenges Wainwright, suggesting rather that Justa finds belonging in the “House of Israel” by refusing attempts at categorisation, simply believing that she is already part of this new social order.<sup>121</sup> Justa is desperate and suffering, and full of compassion for the pain of her daughter and so she is ready to “counter challenge” Jesus.<sup>122</sup>

The image of bread is also taken up in a variety of ways, its location alongside disputes on cultic purity indicating its nature as metaphor.<sup>123</sup> The text is situated between two feeding narratives (Matt 14:13-21, 15:29-39), where bread is shared so generously that there are many crumbs left over.<sup>124</sup> Notably, Guardiola-Sáenz reflects on bread as an image of abundance and health, a sharing around the table as equals, and she concludes her

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<sup>116</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz “Borderless Women”, 78; Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 10.

<sup>117</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans), 2007, 572/1603, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.divinity.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=url,ip,cookie,uid&db=nlebk&AN=1058550&site=ehost-live>

<sup>118</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz “Borderless Women”, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Wainwright, *Shall we look*, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Wainwright, “A Voice from the Margin”, 143.

<sup>121</sup> Febbie C. Dickerson, “The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:22-28): Discharging the Stigma of Single Moms in the African American Church,” in *Matthew: Texts @ Contexts Series*, eds Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James P. Grimshaw (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2013), 74, eBook.

<sup>122</sup> Wainwright, *Shall we look*, 87.

<sup>123</sup> Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, The Bible & Liberation Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 51.

<sup>124</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 8.

reflection with the image of Justa breaking bread with Jesus as an “act of restitution and humani[z]ation”.<sup>125</sup> Mel contrasts Justa’s lack of privilege with those eating their fill of Jesus’ generous love.<sup>126</sup> Monro (following Wainwright’s lead) notes Justa’s liturgical language, a gentile ‘other’ acknowledging Jesus as Messiah, and linking the term “Lord” with Sophia and Wisdom imagery for Christ and the bread “of understanding”.<sup>127</sup>

Whatever way the bread image is interpreted, there appears to be an abundance of food surrounding the story and if there is plenty, I wonder how it can justify Justa’s rejection. To mix metaphors, why can the host not get a bigger table so that the crumbs can be used by all God’s children? Why is Justa not given what her heart has desired amid what appears to be abundant bread? If the dog terminology is the insult it appears to be, and if Justa seems to accept the limits of it and allow it to cement her inferior status, I simply hear it as desperation in the apparent rejection of her needs, of her pain and that of her child. Without accepting denigration by this powerful man, she remains unheard and unheeded until she makes further use of ‘correct’ language, deferring to his power. When she uses the language of praise and liturgy, she is applauded and held up as an example. What shifts in this moment? This moment of Jesus’ enlightenment may be seen as Berenice’s true healing. Jesus’ initial attitude has added to their adversity. Now as the women are truly heard and seen by Jesus, he gains understanding and they gain wholeness. Alvarez proposes that both Jesus and Justa are changed by the encounter, that Jesus’ mission is irrevocably changed from this point.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women”, 69, 80.

<sup>126</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 10.

<sup>127</sup> Monro, “Alterity”, 37.

<sup>128</sup> Alvarez, “Bible Study”, 12.

Regarding the point Jesus uses about the bread belonging to children, I will stress one point. Justa's heart is broken through the longing for wholeness for her child who is suffering greatly. Jesus uses the language of the satisfaction and flourishing of the deserving children as a reason to deny her the relief from suffering of her own child. He is offering the bread to children who are already healthy and whole, the children of privilege, while withholding it from the one in most need of its sustenance and restoration. On the surface, this seems cruel and callous in the extreme and I will return to this discussion later. This point of extreme insensitivity seems to have been overlooked in the literature.

## Section 4: Conclusions and Issues

Readers of this narrative tend to find themselves located within it,<sup>129</sup> hearing and responding differently to the invitation to enter it, to identify with the characters and hear the interaction from their perspectives. The conclusions they draw are dependent on the point from which the text is entered. While acknowledging Gullotta's concern regarding the use of gospel materials being edited to support a particular theological agenda,<sup>130</sup> I will now explore further some conclusions drawn from the text and the perspectives from which they come.

Like Wainwright, several writers have taken the approach of mapping exegetical endeavours through history.<sup>131</sup> Klancher has made a sweeping overview of interpretive approaches, and she follows up the historical study with a creative approach using avatars to explore the story.<sup>132</sup> Lyons Pardue uses Klancher's historical study to support her view

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<sup>129</sup> Lyons-Pardue, "A Syrophoenician Woman", 243.

<sup>130</sup> Gullotta, "Among Dogs and Disciples", 338.

<sup>131</sup> Wainwright et al., *Matthew: an introduction*.

<sup>132</sup> Klancher. *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 251.



that the reading of the passage has remained static.<sup>133</sup> Lawrence also begins with historical mapping of the traditional interpretations but moves on to readings through a feminist, a disabled, and a postcolonial prism.<sup>134</sup>

Through a Bible study using the text, Alvarez locates the encounter in “profound theological debate” and uses discussions on impurity between Jesus and the Pharisees to contextualise it. The impurity extends to Jesus’ “recuperation” in an impure and “foreign” land and in his encounter with one who represents extreme impurity through “her sex, her ethnicity, her religion and her social status”.<sup>135</sup>

Demonstrating a very different perspective, Coffey uses her very brief study to state that Justa is alone in winning an argument with Jesus.<sup>136</sup> Coffey asserts that although women were leaders in the early church, they were later denied the right to leadership.<sup>137</sup> She appears to make a huge leap, however, by linking this with high rates of sexual crime toward women in denominations where women are relegated to a lower status than men in leadership.<sup>138</sup> Citing a newspaper article to support her arguments, she neglects any substantive evidence due to the extreme brevity of her study.<sup>139</sup>

The ultimate conclusion for Kim, is that the hermeneutical key to this passage is *Imitatio Christi*, following the example of Jesus.<sup>140</sup> Patte agrees but comes to this hesitantly. He approaches the text deliberately through the choice of ‘discipleship’ as his lens and

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<sup>133</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophoenician Woman”, 243.

<sup>134</sup> Lawrence, “Crumb trails”, 262.

<sup>135</sup> Alvarez, “Bible Study”, 12

<sup>136</sup> Kathy Coffey, *More Hidden Women of the Gospels* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 47.

<sup>137</sup> Coffey, *More Hidden Women*, 49.

<sup>138</sup> Coffey, *More Hidden Women*, 50.

<sup>139</sup> Coffey, *More Hidden Women*, 50, cites an article by Nicholas Kristof “Rapists Presented by Their Church as Men of God” (NY Times: February 20 2019) to support this link.

<sup>140</sup> Kim, “The Canaanite Woman’s Story”, 284.

discovers three possibilities for transformative encounter.<sup>141</sup> He dismisses the first, because it requires that Justa must accept her place in submission to Jesus' authority and it risks a triumphalistic tone. The third option of following Justa as an example seemed valid, but a sense of his own privilege made him unable to sit in her place in a "spirit of dispossession".<sup>142</sup> Patte chooses to follow the second option, the *Imitatio Christi*, to follow Jesus' example in listening through deep encounter with the marginalised. Patte wonders whether it was Jesus' perception of Justa that was transformed as she stands in her own culture and re-interprets the mission from that place.<sup>143</sup> While Patte's meaning in his multiple uses of the term "God's Will" remains unclear, he calls the church to follow Jesus in accepting the challenge to recognise revelation in those who reconstrue its mission, redefining discipleship as the struggle for justice.<sup>144</sup>

It is this encounter with the marginalised 'other' that is transformative and, as it seems to take centre stage in most conclusions, I will approach it by first exploring the concept of 'other', then in examining transformation through marginal spaces.

#### **4.1 The 'Other'**

Whatever conclusions can be drawn from Matthew's heightening and intensifying of the drama of the Markan text, it has increased the total 'otherness' of Justa and Berenice. The women together represent those on the margins. Monro argues that, while Justa is 'other', she is also a challenge to the usual dichotomies because she is defining her own place.<sup>145</sup> While she is "out of place" and displaced, she is also in her place as an indigenous

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<sup>141</sup> Daniel Patte, "The Canaanite woman and Jesus: surprising models of discipleship (Matt. 15:21-28)," in *Transformative encounters: Jesus and women re-viewed*, ed. Ingrid R Kitzberger (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 33-53.

<sup>142</sup> Patte, "The Canaanite woman", 53.

<sup>143</sup> Patte, "The Canaanite woman", 41, 44.

<sup>144</sup> Patte, "The Canaanite woman", 51.

<sup>145</sup> Monro, "Alterity", 39.

woman.<sup>146</sup> Justa holds up the vision of the inclusive kingdom, the “basileia”, and in re-impacting it to Jesus, she becomes “the Christ herself”.<sup>147</sup> Justa powerfully re-defines the ‘other’. Only a few chapters before this passage, the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12) remind us that Jesus has a heart for those, like Justa, who are hungry for righteousness, for the poor and needy. Dickerson proposes that Jesus’ attitudinal shift from outsider/insider language in the story, functions alongside the Beatitudes in representing diversity and the rejection of the dominant culture.<sup>148</sup>

Justa stands in for all those on the edges who resist and protest, embodying “intersections of identity” in this “interpretive encounter”.<sup>149</sup> She is used as a “tool”, a “text”, appropriated to thoroughly represent the ‘other’. A Canaanite, a woman, a mother, active and vocal rather than passive and silent, a representative of the dispossessed and the dangerous risktaker, she also stands as a pursuer of justice and compassion.<sup>150</sup> In faith, which is unbound and uncontained, she refuses to accept the limits which attempt to confine the gospel.

Lyons-Pardue links Justa to Jezebel,<sup>151</sup> Rahab, and the Widow of Zarephath,<sup>152</sup> arguing that (read through Israel’s history) this is a story about faith found in “unexpected places” and outside the boundaries.<sup>153</sup> Dickerson asserts that Matthew uses the story of the Canaanite woman to demonstrate just and inclusive treatment of the ‘other’<sup>154</sup>, but Baffes goes further in contending that in God, the ‘other’ does not exist and all are given

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<sup>146</sup> Monro, “Alterity”, 41.

<sup>147</sup> Monro, “Alterity”, 41.

<sup>148</sup> Dickerson, “The Canaanite Woman”, 69, 74, 75.

<sup>149</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophenician Woman”, 246, 247.

<sup>150</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophenician Woman”, 246, 247.

<sup>151</sup> 1 Kgs 16, linking her identity to wickedness.

<sup>152</sup> Josh 2: 14, 1 Kgs 17.

<sup>153</sup> Lyons-Pardue, “A Syrophenician Woman”, 250.

<sup>154</sup> Dickerson, “The Canaanite Woman”, 70.

honour.<sup>155</sup> This encounter stands in “stark contrast” to the other stories and characters in Matthew’s gospel, the heart of its message being central to the agenda of the implied author.<sup>156</sup> Baffes’ concludes that Jesus is imaged intentionally as the “learner”, rather than his customary “teacher” role, to embody the model of transformation.<sup>157</sup> As a model of faith, Justa is a reminder that God operates outside the “bounds of cultural norms” which function to create limitations around worth, value and identity.<sup>158</sup>

Mel’s primary conclusion is that despite the Jewish priority, Jesus makes an exception for this “demonstration” of inclusive and compassionate faith.<sup>159</sup> Jesus’ concern is more for issues of heart and faithfulness than the limits of ethnicity. Still, Mel’s conclusion is limited to entitlement and inclusion, and the commendation and reward of faith. In subtle contrast, Cadwallader’s conclusion is based around unwavering commitment to another and questions whether the church (like Jesus) can be “surprised” by the gospel from outside, by those who do not normally fit its “parameters”.<sup>160</sup>

Despite her specifically Anglican focus, Lee uses the narrative to remind the church that ‘the other’ is always present, in the woman refused church leadership, the adult with a background of abuse, the clergy member who has mishandled a situation, those who seek asylum, suffer dementia, abuse others, or hold different faith views.<sup>161</sup> Graue also relates contemporary examples for the church, and she tells the story of Heather.<sup>162</sup> Heather is someone who could appear to be totally ‘other’, perhaps “misfit” and “outcast”, in the

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<sup>155</sup> Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite woman”, 20.

<sup>156</sup> Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite woman”, 13.

<sup>157</sup> Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite woman”, 18.

<sup>158</sup> Baffes, “Jesus and the Canaanite woman”, 20, 21.

<sup>159</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 10, 11.

<sup>160</sup> Cadwallader, “Surprised by faith”, 100. The “surprise” of faith in unexpected places to which Cadwallader calls the church to be alert.

<sup>161</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 19, 20.

<sup>162</sup> Joyce M. Graue, “A Problem . . . or a Moonbeam? Sermon Study on Matthew 15:21-28,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 30, no. 2 (Aug 1996): 75.

church setting where Graue ministers.<sup>163</sup> Heather's 'otherness' disrupts the stereotypes of church attender, and her presence requires people to look again at their responses. If Jesus is looking for examples of faith amongst the disciples and Jewish leaders and finds it instead in Justa, perhaps Heather is the place to find it in the church.<sup>164</sup> Graue describes Heather's struggle with her identity, her sexuality and gender, and with criminality, as the epitome of true faith. Locating this story alongside descriptions of the marginality of Sydney's homeless people, this story is a powerful modern reminder of the Canaanite woman's story. In Graue's account, the homeless and the border crossers are made welcome in the church and can trust that the host has a sufficiently large table and enough bread that they do not need to search for crumbs.<sup>165</sup>

While Justa is clearly marginalised on many levels, she is not "submissive" but is "strong and determined", and she displays some considerable knowledge.<sup>166</sup> Her anger rises up from the "submissive whisper of the alienated".<sup>167</sup> She is acquainted with the language of faith and how best to flatter Jesus and she clearly holds her own in this "verbal fencing match".<sup>168</sup> Justa holds Jesus to account through her use of the language of the system and her posture in standing before him, reminding Jesus of the privilege and power he has gained through her oppression.<sup>169</sup> There is a cost to this privilege, the "dehumani[z]ation" of the oppressed, and to himself through his lack of engagement and respect.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Graue, "A Problem or a moonbeam", 76.

<sup>164</sup> Graue, "A Problem or a moonbeam", 76.

<sup>165</sup> Graue, "A Problem or a moonbeam", 78.

<sup>166</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women", 76.

<sup>167</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women", 76.

<sup>168</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 569/1603.

<sup>169</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women", 76.

<sup>170</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women", 76.

Justa, as the presence of the “resistant oppressed” brings healing and transformation to Jesus and those complicit in the oppression of the marginalised.<sup>171</sup> Justa is prophet, Dalit woman, Indigenous mother, “voice of God” and with “cleverness and wit”, Justa stands before Jesus. Risking rejection, she asserts her dignity, teaching Jesus about mission and liberation.<sup>172</sup>

## 4.2 Marginality and Centrality

Dickerson’s definition of marginalisation is not to have control over one’s own life situation, an insight which is thoroughly true of Justa.<sup>173</sup> As this story unfolds, the woman character, remaining un-named throughout the story, moves into centrality in the narrative and Jesus withdraws to the margins. I examine this in the awareness of Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument regarding the flaws in the reconstructive method of ““background” and “centre”” which allow for the assertion of Christian supremacist world views and elevate the “liberated status” of Christian women above Jewish or pagan women.<sup>174</sup>

Alexander discusses the “constructions” of marginalisation, adding ‘ed’ to his terms to reinforce the active participation in their construction.<sup>175</sup> He addresses race and white supremacy with Israel’s exodus from Egypt as his template, going on to discuss the Canaanite Jewish Jesus in Matthew, in a particular exploration of faith and race. Using the story of Joshua’s conquering of Jericho, Alexander makes the interesting shift from Joshua the conqueror of the Canaanites (and First Nations more broadly) into Joshua the Christ.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Alexander, “Raced”, 330, 332.

<sup>172</sup> Alexander, “Raced”, 333.

<sup>173</sup> Dickerson, “The Canaanite Woman”, 73.

<sup>174</sup> Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 146.

<sup>175</sup> Alexander, “Raced”, 320.

<sup>176</sup> Alexander, “Raced”, 330.

He describes Jesus' entry into the narrative as present already in the womb of his great-grandmother Rahab the Canaanite prostitute.<sup>177</sup>

Justa crosses these boundaries constructed around gender, religious, racial, social, class, and cultural norms, in her desperation to ease the pain of her child. While we can only wonder about her feelings on bringing herself into full focus, she moves from the edge into the centre of the narrative by giving voice to her own pain, and that of her ailing child. She raises her voice in pain and lament. The men gathered around Jesus are threatened by the volume and the vulnerability of the woman's cry and are disinclined to be involved with her daughter's suffering. Her courage and her desperation allow her to 'make a scene', to engage Jesus, yet she remains unheard and voiceless.

Wainwright plays with the centrality/marginality motif, the centrality of Jesus at the beginning with Justa on the margin, and then the turning point where Justa becomes the central character and Jesus is pushed to the periphery from where he can meet the challenge.<sup>178</sup> While Dube acknowledges that feminist readings are at least liberative in nature, she counter-challenges Wainwright's view that Justa is allowed to become a truly central character. Dube declares that Justa does not tell her own story, which is in fact written against her, while appropriating her story and her pain.<sup>179</sup> Her dismissal by Jesus and the men is insulting and this woman, who is marginalised multiple times over, as gender, social, and ethnic 'other', refuses to be silenced. Jesus is at first cast in the role as a sullen, unfeeling, and exclusionary character who makes his points at the expense of the poor and withstands any challenge to power by the marginalised. It is in the shift from a stubborn place of privilege that Jesus is open to hearing her reality and can recognise his place in her

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<sup>177</sup> Alexander, "Raced", 330.

<sup>178</sup> Wainwright, "A Voice from the Margin" 1865/5663.

<sup>179</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 177.

oppression, and in her healing. It is here in the margins that Jesus sees more clearly his own teaching on the *basileia*. Schipani, however, argues that the margins are familiar ground for Jesus as a homeless person, an outsider of lowly origins and friend of the outcast.<sup>180</sup>

Likening the issues to the current Korean experience with colonisation and empire in Japan, Kinukawa explores the story, making significant points about the borders.<sup>181</sup> She dismisses scholarly arguments regarding Justa winning Jesus over through her wit and her bold faith. Instead, she describes Justa's role in changing the narrative, her setting of the scene for Jesus to cross onto her side of the boundaries. Kinukawa describes Jesus' venture in crossing the boundaries as a defilement, an action which causes Jesus to "become least".<sup>182</sup> Radically re-defining "the community of faith", Jesus acts to give life, to invite Gentiles and the outcast, the poor, the rejected, and the sick, into the place previously "occupied by the privileged people protected by their purity laws".<sup>183</sup>

It is here on the "borderlands", where places of transformation are discovered through a new experience of reality, through marginality and vulnerability, and through the struggle for justice.<sup>184</sup> In the "unsettled and unsettling" energy of the space in between boundaries,<sup>185</sup> Justa helps expand Jesus' vision of this Kingdom, and she utilises some of the power she gains. Justa and Jesus stand at the margins together, testing, challenging, and breaking the boundaries to bring healing and transformation, perhaps for each of the characters in the encounter.

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<sup>180</sup> Schipani, "Transformation in the Borderlands", 18, 19.

<sup>181</sup> Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark*, 62. I have veered to the Markan version but find its clarification of the context helpful, in particular Matthew's heightening of the "other" and the border crossing in the narrative.

<sup>182</sup> Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark*, 61.

<sup>183</sup> Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark*, 62.

<sup>184</sup> Schipani, "Transformation in the Borderlands", 21.

<sup>185</sup> Musa W. Dube, "Boundaries and Bridges: Journeys of a Postcolonial Feminist in Biblical Studies," in *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 22, (2014): 155, doi: 10.2143/ESWTR.22.0.3040795



### 4.3 Berenice, Demon Possession, Disability and Healing

While Justa lives on the borderlands, Berenice is only present in the encounter through her mother's advocacy. According to Matthew's text, Berenice was "tormented by a demon". While I will not specifically address demon possession and exorcism, I will explore its indications intersectionally through the lens of feminist thinkers. Entering the text from perspectives around deafness, Lawrence proposes that the manifestation of the demonic in Berenice may be the gesticulation of sign language.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps she is suffering through epileptic seizures. Whatever choices we make in interpreting this "devil", clearly Berenice is suffering some form of disability. In encounters between Jesus and voiceless, nameless, disabled figures, healing and disability are incidental, and here Berenice functions as a plot device enlisted to spotlight Jesus and convey shifts in missional teaching.<sup>187</sup> Berenice is de-humanised by this function and like many others suffering with disability, she has no voice in her own story.

Pointing to links between demon possession and mental illness, Smith uses terms such as "unclean spirits", to highlight the "dis-ease" around the "unacceptable" and "out of order" nature of such phenomena.<sup>188</sup> The labels around demon possession as impure and unclean, are applied through ignorance based on the discomfort caused to society.<sup>189</sup> Noting that Jesus does not directly touch those possessed by unclean spirits, Smith argues that the

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<sup>186</sup> Lawrence, "Reading Matthew's Gospel", 160.

<sup>187</sup> James A. Metzger and James P. Grimshaw. "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives from the Perspectives of the Caregiver and the Disabled." in *Matthew: Texts @ Contexts Series*, Eds Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James P. Grimshaw (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2013): 136.

<sup>188</sup> Mitzi Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass": Reading Mark 7: 24-30 through a Womanist Lens of Intersectionality and Inter(con)textuality," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, edited by Gay L. Byron, and Vanessa Lovelace, Semeia Studies 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 103.

<sup>189</sup> Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass"", 102.

tendency to treat “anomalies” by either ignoring their existence or acknowledging but condemning them, remains common in today’s society.<sup>190</sup>

Metzger, writing from the “perspective of the disabled”, notes the issues which perpetuate the “causal link” between sin and disability/illness/demon possession.<sup>191</sup> Repentance and forgiveness are offered, with healing as an addendum. Churches follow the disciples’ example of problematising disability, showing disinclination to get involved or hoping for the granting of a solution. Problems occur when churches adopt models based on encounters such as this text and its offer of full and immediate healing, causing deeper suffering by promoting a “fantasy of cure”.<sup>192</sup> What is needed most for disabled people, Metzger argues, is for people to be accommodated and given “access and justice”.<sup>193</sup>

Matthew’s Jesus appears to view disability as “impairment”, a “dysfunction” and “deficit to be remediated”.<sup>194</sup> Seen through what functions as a medical model, disability is constructed and located in an individual body to be “rehabilitate[d]”, rather than a social model which addresses disability as a societal responsibility and acknowledges an “array” of different dis/abilities.<sup>195</sup> Transformation in this sense becomes about support, acceptance, and accessibility. However, in this text, the seekers of transformation and healing must plead for mercy, using ‘insider’ language to flatter and “ingratiate” themselves, to declare their own “unworthiness”.<sup>196</sup> Healing is almost an “afterthought”, it is “commodity” rather than gift and is “contingent” on their faith, with Berenice totally dependent on her mother’s faith.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Smith, “Race, Gender, and the Politics of “Sass””, 102.

<sup>191</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 133.

<sup>192</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 138.

<sup>193</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 133.

<sup>194</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 3.

<sup>195</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 135.

<sup>196</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 137, 138.

<sup>197</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives”, 138.

Concerned about “facile appropriations” of those who are oppressed by “radicals” with good intentions, Donaldson describes interpretations of disability as inferiority and “deviance” in her study of links between “colonial oppression and forms of mental illness” and labels of demon possession.<sup>198</sup> An anti-colonial and postcolonial lens highlights those who serve as “plot-devices” and “throwaway” characters and allow the struggles of this “extraordinary daughter” to cause alteration and displacement.<sup>199</sup> Bringing Berenice to the foreground allows the full presence of this currently invisible daughter,<sup>200</sup> allowing healing through the questioning and de-construction of the labels.

Donaldson adopts the view that the dignity and status of the disabled, and those of other “diverse communities” is diminished by them being depicted continually as sites where the divine is active.<sup>201</sup> Donaldson asks why these narratives “manifest such anxiety” about those exhibiting disability and she puts forward the notion that disabled bodies remind us of our own self out of control and “running rampant”.<sup>202</sup> She refers to this as confirming the “cultural other” which lies “dormant” in us.<sup>203</sup> Donaldson’s use of an intertextual link to the Gerasene exorcism, explores healing in these stories as domesticating and neutralising, making the “in-valid” to be “civiliz[ed]” and “fit for society”.<sup>204</sup> Lawrence joins Donaldson in reading from a post-colonial perspective and she calls Berenice a “passive site”, proposing that her “indigenous power” has been “robbed”

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<sup>198</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 98, 99, 102.

<sup>199</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 101.

<sup>200</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 101.

<sup>201</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 101.

<sup>202</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 101.

<sup>203</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 101.

<sup>204</sup> Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings”, 103, 104. Donaldson uses this story (Matt 18; 23-27) to link “Roman imperial occupation” and the Gerasene man possessed by “Legion” and argues that exorcism is a revolutionary act.

from her through the colonising effects of past interpretations.<sup>205</sup> Donaldson goes further to state that her healing is an anti-colonial act on Jesus' part.<sup>206</sup>

People who experience disability call for inclusion through new "symbols, practices, and beliefs".<sup>207</sup> Concepts such as impurity and disability are social constructions and as such can be changed and "deconstructed" by the inclusive retelling of story.<sup>208</sup> Perhaps a way to achieve this is to pick up Donaldson's suggestion to tell the story with Berenice in the centre.<sup>209</sup> Just as Jesus is taught by Justa, so we can learn from Berenice. The church's challenge is to find healing and transformation by lifting the silence, to allow itself to be ministered to by hearing those with disability.<sup>210</sup>

#### 4.4 Motherhood

Matthew has a heavy emphasis on mothering, using the term "mother" twenty-six times.<sup>211</sup> Justa appears to be a single mother and her mothering role is significant. Diverse perspectives of mothering lead us in entering the text through this theme. Rubano has reflected on the advocacy role regarding gender non-conforming children and the church's pastoral sensibility.<sup>212</sup> He suggests that it is the very moment of Jesus' transformation that the "demon" is removed from the child.<sup>213</sup> When barriers to thriving through societal attitudes bend to accommodate children to be themselves, the environment supports the child to flourish.

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<sup>205</sup> Lawrence, "Reading Matthew's Gospel," 272, 273.

<sup>206</sup> Donaldson, "Gospel Hauntings", 102, 103.

<sup>207</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>208</sup> Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass,"" 102.

<sup>209</sup> Donaldson, "Gospel Hauntings," 100.

<sup>210</sup> Lawrence, "Crumb trails", 270, 272.

<sup>211</sup> Tsiu-yuk Louise Liu, "Matthean "Mothers" and Disenfranchised Hong Kong Working Mothers," in *Matthew: Texts @ Contexts Series*, eds. Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James F. Grimshaw (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 93.

<sup>212</sup> Craig Anthony Rubano, "Where Do the Mermaids Stand? Toward a 'Gender-Creative' Pastoral Sensibility." *Pastoral Psychology* 65, no. 6 (Dec 2016), 821-834 .

<sup>213</sup> Rubano, "Where do the Mermaids Stand?", 830.

Dickerson points to the relevance of this story in its challenge to stigma, especially around single mothering in African American communities.<sup>214</sup> Crowder is a womanist theologian and a black working mother, who finds in Justa's story, a way to challenge stereotypes of motherhood.<sup>215</sup> Berenice can be seen as a "latchkey child" who needs the support of the network of community surrounding her, and motherhood here is modelled on Justa's advocacy and mediation on behalf of another.<sup>216</sup>

When Biblical motherhood is idealised and fantasies around mothering are created, other models of mothering are marginalised.<sup>217</sup> The difficulties associated with maintaining a mother-child relationship in the face of difference, disability, or sustained illness, are enormous. Liu, who writes from her perspective as one of the working mothers of Hong Kong, makes comparisons between the experience of these women and the "disenfranchisement" of the intimacy in the relationship between mother and child, which she calls the "deepest grief of the Gospel".<sup>218</sup> Justa wails her own pain to Jesus, her own inability to cope and to care for her daughter. This is a universal wail of mothers where children are suffering terribly.

Remembering that images of God are always metaphor, the image of the Divine as Mother may sit more comfortably with women who experience deep suffering.<sup>219</sup> The Divine as a mother who weeps over our pain may seem less silent or have a different quality

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<sup>214</sup> Dickerson, "The Canaanite Woman", 65.

<sup>215</sup> Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, "When Mommy Goes to Work: A Contemporary Analysis of the Canaanite Mother." in *Matthew: Texts @ Contexts Series*, edited by Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James P. Grimshaw (Media, 2013), 91, 92.

<sup>216</sup> Crowder, "When Mommy Goes to Work", 82, 92.

<sup>217</sup> Dickerson, "The Canaanite Woman", 67, 73.

<sup>218</sup> Liu, "Matthean "Mothers"", 106.

<sup>219</sup> Ally Moder, "Women, Personhood, and the Male God: A Feminist Critique of Patriarchal Concepts of God in View of Domestic Abuse," *Feminist Theology* 28, no. 1 (2019): 87 Moder argues the importance of maintaining use of male Trinitarian imagery in liberative ways. Deeper discussion on feminist imagery of the Divine is outside the scope of this thesis.

of silence. Justa's story offers solidarity and resistance to women who are marginalised through the idealising of Biblical motherhood.

Justa stands with all those mothers who have pleaded and called, who have spoken the 'right' language and 'played the game'. She gives witness to those who have choked while uttering placating words to the powerful who offer nothing in return and withhold resources. I am reminded of those mothers who beseech the authorities for the crumbs. I hear the cry of asylum seeker mothers whose children are ill, whose children cannot flourish or find decent social connection and the affirmation of community. When the children of the powerful and the privileged are given precedence over the children of the marginalised, silence is more than dismissal. When those with the power to change and heal and transform by saying a word or flourishing a pen, choose to remain silent and hoard the breadcrumbs for themselves, the response of silence speaks volumes.

## **Section 5: Justa and My Story - Resonances**

We stood in a circle surrounding the chairs, one chair in place for each of the characters in the story of the Canaanite woman's encounter with Jesus. The leader's instruction was for us to sit in any chair as the drama unfolded and to be witness to the encounter by being present as characters within it. My friend 'Kate' sat in Justa's chair and as the drama commenced, she began to plead and wail for her child.<sup>220</sup> I knew Kate had played this role in real life as she struggled for services to support her own child's mental health. She was Justa, and as I witnessed this moment, I also became very aware of watching my own place in the story as the same character Justa. I shared a very poignant

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<sup>220</sup> Her name is altered to protect privacy.

moment with Justa and Kate, momentarily sitting with Justa in some of her reality, and in doing so recognised that the truly invisible person is Berenice. This truth really affected both Kate and myself.

Justa invites us to enter the narrative from the point of view of our own context, an invitation I will accept in this section. My son Tim was born with a significant disability.<sup>221</sup> Since his birth in 1982, there have been many times when I have pleaded and wailed to those who had the power to assist me. Many times, my pleas were met with silence. I hear myself in Justa's story and because I believe theology is done and lived through encounter with the hermeneutics of real life, I tell some of our story here. Like Justa, I have been told to accept the 'breadcrumbs', causing me to wonder how the sharing of resources can be considered stealing from the 'children'.<sup>222</sup> In particular, I remember a woman complaining that her own children (who were doing well as 'mainstream' students at school) were deprived because the 'special needs' children were entitled to extra funding resources. I am reminded of the saying, from an 'unknown source', "When you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression".

The withholding of resources, lest there be a cost to others, was particularly notable when our family moved from New South Wales to Victoria in 1992. We had applied for, and been granted, a few extra hours of support in the classroom. When we moved to the regional town where we would be based, I visited five schools. Each one of them admitted that they technically had to agree to take Tim but made it clear that he would not be truly welcomed due to the extra effort they would need to make. Finally, the regional officer responsible for inclusion of those with special needs made it very clear we could choose

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<sup>221</sup> Tim was diagnosed with Prader-Willi Syndrome in 1988. I have Tim's explicit permission to talk about our story, but I recognise that only Tim can truly tell his own story.

<sup>222</sup> Lyons-Pardue, "A Syrophoenician Woman", 242.

whichever school we wanted, and she would see to the change of attitude. Our reliance on the few special funding 'crumbs' simply provided a slightly more level playing field, but the sting of being unwelcome remained.

When I pleaded for assistance in housing Tim because his behaviour in his adolescent years was beyond our ability to manage and was putting our other two sons at risk, 'the system' suggested I keep silent or face the other two being rehoused which would be an easier solution for 'the system'. After a whistle-blower complaint from a public servant in a government housing facility forced the revelation of serious abuse on Tim, I begged to no avail to receive the official reports that were generated but kept confidential. When Tim set himself on fire, we were at least granted a consultation with bureaucrats who agreed that they had not truly listened to Tim's needs. When Tim made significant allegations of abuse by a predator at a day placement, the police told us they accepted the voracity of the allegation. Sadly, they declined to pursue the case as intellectually disabled people are rarely successful in court due to concerns of their capacity as credible witnesses.

I have regularly called out for one thing and been given another. Our family sought behavioural assistance and we were seen by a team of psychologists who clearly did not understand the dysfunction in Tim's brain and just kept giving us strategies and bar graphs while our family sank further into extreme distress. This has been also true of some churches who were not listening. We have been very well supported by church communities on many occasions, yet there have been times where we have sought care and prayer, and instead been given offers of cure and healing (through repentance and forgiveness). Every cell in Tim's body is affected and I have come to see Tim's healing as being achieved by those who will allow him to be himself and can see that it is Tim who ministers to others.



I have cried and wailed and lamented before, what has appeared at times, to be a mute and deaf Divine Presence. The change I have encountered has been my own transformation in learning to advocate for my child, in regrouping as I find the steadiness in myself, in challenging society's limits and responses, its definitions and labels. I have come to see that Tim's greatest disability is the limit to his flourishing through the attitudes of others. Just as Alexander adds 'ed' to race, gender, faith, and sex,<sup>223</sup> I would apply 'ed' in discussions on difference(d) through ability and the experience of being embrace(d).

I am Justa. Justa is me.<sup>224</sup> Often, I have not been heard or given a response to my pleas. I have suffered silence from the institutional system set up to deliver care and support, and I have at times, known the experience of the silence of God. Jesus' lingering silence in his encounter with Justa is profound in its echoes. When a mother wails her pain in deep lament, if the one who holds the key to healing speaks not a word in answer, it feels like a petty withholding of presence and of transformational space. Justa has forsaken convention and calls again and again, proclaiming to the world her daughter's affliction. Without deviating from her purpose Justa focuses on her daughter all through her sad tale. Justa gathers her wits and her voice, and preparing her argument, she rises up to insist on the rights and entitlement of Berenice to access structures and resources which can support her dignity and empowerment.

Your cry mirrors mine, Justa. When you call out your suffering and there is no response, when the silence makes you feel worthless and powerless, what inspires you to try again? Desperation? You draw on all your resources, thankful for your knowledge and rhetorical ability, your wit, and your sass, and you meet the challenge. But the power is

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<sup>223</sup> Alexander, "Raced", 319.

<sup>224</sup> Again, I acknowledge that as a white woman of privilege, I share only some of Justa's marginalisation.

never really with you. You must hear the insult and play the game. You call out the false words and the disparity, the lack of justice and fairness. Weary of the fight, you must accept the crumbs and know the preciousness of every little piece, because not everyone can find access. Justa, my lament sounds out in your voice. You did not choose to be my voice too, but I stand with you and with all the Justas. And for the Berenices whose healing appears to depend on concepts of worthiness and bold faith.

## **Section 6: Meeting God in Silence**

Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that narratological features, such as who speaks and acts and who is silent, reveal significant pointers in interpretation. Jesus holds that moment of silence. Berenice is entirely silent. The disciples appear to want Justa to be silent (whether by granting or dismissing). The silence becomes a roar as Justa considers, in that moment of Jesus' silence, and then uses the pause to declare her desire. Justa uses the silence to find deeper communion with Jesus, to meet him in his place.

The three questions that this study attempts to answer are related to contemporary women and how the silence might speak to them. While this Canaanite woman's interaction with Jesus, and the "latent racial tensions" with which it grapples, sits uncomfortably with contemporary readers, the story vibrates with relevance in current times. I hear the pause in the story through the stories of contemporary women who have been victimised by men in powerful positions in contemporary times who invite us to a fresh reading of the passage in a new context.<sup>225</sup> While deeper interrogation of Jesus' response of silence in the story in the context of the abuse of women in general terms is a worthy one, it is outside the scope

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<sup>225</sup> Lyons-Pardue, "A Syrophenician Woman", 236.

of this study. However, in light of the #SayHerName and #Black-WomensLivesMatter movements, I note Mitzi Smith's discussion on the "sass" shown by Justa.<sup>226</sup> Justa's boldness is a valid form of "agency", a "truth telling" to authority which, through corruption and bias, would deny life and healing.<sup>227</sup> Such strength is a legitimate form of resistance in confronting exploitative and oppressive treatment and Justa and Berenice, like "sassy" black women, deserve to have their stories told and celebrated.<sup>228</sup>

### 6.1 "Not a word"

The gap in current research appears to be in exploring the silence of Jesus' response and its relevance for women that follow. This thesis attempts to test this silence and Justa's experience of it. The central focus of my thesis is on that silence, no matter how short or how long, that pregnant pause in the story between Justa's crying out and Jesus' response. While there is limited mention of this silence in the commentary, I find that it is this silence that speaks most loudly. Schipani too, describes this "deafening" silence as the most "striking and problematic" aspect of the interaction.<sup>229</sup>

Martin describes it as a "heartless" silence, the response from Jesus' own embarrassment, and refers to his casual dismissal as a strange way to hear a mother's pleas for a suffering child.<sup>230</sup> Lyons-Pardue labels it a refusal but wonders whether Jesus said nothing because he was engaged in rapid interpretation of the significance of this encounter historically.<sup>231</sup> Perhaps so, but the idea of Jesus rapidly thinking it through falls close to the

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<sup>226</sup> Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass", while Smith uses the Markan version of the story, the relevance is clear.

<sup>227</sup> Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass"", 110.

<sup>228</sup> Smith, "Race, Gender, and the Politics of "Sass"", 110.

<sup>229</sup> Schipani, "Transformation in the Borderlands", 15, 16.

<sup>230</sup> Hugh Martin, cited in Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 110.

<sup>231</sup> Lyons-Pardue, "A Syrophenician", 248. However, the suggestion that Jesus is trying to categorise the woman in the moment of hesitation seems tenuous.

trap of absolutism that Lyons-Pardue claims to be trying to avoid. While Mel is insistent that Jesus does answer Justa, she calls the silence a “lack of response”, indicating either testing or refusal on Jesus’ part.<sup>232</sup> Mel proposes that the silence could indicate Jesus’ hesitation in the moment, but she strongly argues against Jesus having any hesitation in regard to his own mission.<sup>233</sup> Others have argued that it shows the general lack of Jesus’ regard for women, that Jesus was trying to test and “enflame” her faith rather than “extinguish” it.<sup>234</sup> Dube labels it a shared “disinterest”, an indication that those who beseech are set up to be ignored and subjugated.<sup>235</sup> Others believe it was to quieten the Jews, or that Jesus was against her Gentile heritage.<sup>236</sup> Cadwallader addresses the silence, arguing that Matthew’s redaction shows Jesus “aversion” to her and her very existence, her affronting presence as a Canaanite, which is a challenge to Jewish privilege.<sup>237</sup> The silence ostracises her and then she is dealt a further insult in being compared to dogs.<sup>238</sup> Scott stresses Jesus’ unjustifiable rudeness in ignoring Justa and Berenice, and not giving them “the time of day”.<sup>239</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz argues that the “strident silence of indifference”, is the typical response of oppressors to the pain of those whom they oppress.<sup>240</sup> When the “Other” responds through “dialectic presence”, such silence reflects “speechless” astonishment.<sup>241</sup> In alignment with this argument, Alexander proposes that Justa may well be seeking retributive justice for the dispossession of her land, in which case Jesus’ first, “passive” response of silence, while not

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<sup>232</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 8.

<sup>233</sup> Mel, “Jesus and the Canaanite Woman”, 9.

<sup>234</sup> Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 124, 126.

<sup>235</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 149.

<sup>236</sup> Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 104, 124.

<sup>237</sup> Cadwallader, “Surprised by faith”, 93.

<sup>238</sup> Cadwallader, “Surprised by faith”, 93.

<sup>239</sup> Scott, “Matthew”, 22.

<sup>240</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women”, 77.

<sup>241</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women”, 77.

directly inflicting suffering, does nothing to alleviate it.<sup>242</sup> Jesus' silence is "rebuff", and attempts to justify it add "insult to injury", argues Patte, and the church is often complicit in this same pattern of response.<sup>243</sup> When disciples use Jesus as a model for discipleship, such dismissive behaviour must be acknowledged and challenged, the faith of the struggling affirmed and, like Jesus, our vocation redefined and "transformed".<sup>244</sup> Mel, Alvarez and Lyons-Pardue question whether the disciples are actually complicit in the interaction, as they either urge Jesus to ignore her or to grant her request.<sup>245</sup>

Lee's argument that the silence is not dismissal and not experienced by the woman as a "rebuff" is not convincing.<sup>246</sup> In Jesus' silent, enigmatic response, we hear echoes of our own experience of suffering and what appears to be the "deafness of God".<sup>247</sup> Though a "pagan outsider", Justa uses 'insider' language of prayer and supplication, and yet she finds no compassion in Jesus' disturbing and mystifying response.<sup>248</sup> I am arguing, like Rubano, that it is within this silence, which could have felt like "game over", the end of the story, and an 'escalation' deserving of "indignant anger", that Justa shows a remarkable capacity to find equilibrium, to hold steady.<sup>249</sup> Justa, electing not to take it personally, regroupes. Not distracted from her purpose, she de-centres herself and chooses a "different angle" to engage again.<sup>250</sup> Like contemporary women who experience silence from the systems which hold the resources when they plead for the vulnerable and suffering, Justa is tenacious in her compassion for her child.

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<sup>242</sup> Alexander, "Raced", 332.

<sup>243</sup> Patte, "The Canaanite woman", 35, 41.

<sup>244</sup> Patte, "The Canaanite woman", 35.

<sup>245</sup> Mel, "Jesus and the Canaanite Woman", 8; Alvarez, "Bible Study"; 13; Lyons-Pardue, 241.

<sup>246</sup> Lee, "The faith of the Canaanite woman", 8.

<sup>247</sup> Lee, "The faith of the Canaanite woman", 3, 7.

<sup>248</sup> Lee, "The faith of the Canaanite woman", 7.

<sup>249</sup> Rubano, "Where do the Mermaids Stand", 829.

<sup>250</sup> Rubano, "Where do the Mermaids Stand", 829.

## Section 7: God's silence and the silencing of women.

When women name their pain and call out systems of patriarchy, the response is often silence. Just as the disciples attempted to silence Justa, silence is often imposed on women to deny and dismiss their pain. Positions of privilege and dominance provide platforms from which silence can be imposed on the marginalised. Institutional silence eclipses the silence of the marginalised. When the church follows this example it is complicit in perpetuating the silence.<sup>251</sup> Re-telling the story in a different register and against the status quo presents a different voice, changing the way we imagine God and impacting how we live and love.<sup>252</sup> While the scope of this study prevents deeper discussion, Biblical images of women who were exploited, raped, and abused, and were then silenced, present an image of the character of God who silences women. When the church is silent in the face of domestic violence it is complicit, and it presents God as uncaring at best.<sup>253</sup> Significantly, Lawless argues for consideration of whether silenced voices in the margins can be heard in their own context, as the silences are interrogated and “mined” for meaning.<sup>254</sup> Justa calls to Jesus who stands before her representing power and privilege. She takes the risk to cause trouble by calling out the injustice, her story calling for a response because disregarding it replicates the injustice.

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<sup>251</sup> I note Soelle's view that theologians have an “intolerable passion” for finding explanation and reasoning when silence would be the appropriate response. Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 19, 20.

<sup>252</sup> Spencer A. Murray, *A Conspiracy of Silence: Religious and Patriarchal Roots of Violence Towards Women* (USA, 2018), 12, Kindle Edition.

<sup>253</sup> Murray, *A Conspiracy of Silence*, 43.

<sup>254</sup> Elaine J. Lawless, *Women escaping violence: empowerment through narrative* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 80.

The response of silence from systems of power, the silencing of women, and violence toward women are interconnected tools which serve as “interlocking power structures” in systems of patriarchy.<sup>255</sup> Hegde has developed a careful and sensitive listening relationship with abused women in a shelter in Southern India, in order to study the effects of their communication experiences on their agency and power.<sup>256</sup> She concludes that the “meaning of silence” must be “re-thought” due to its part in the “web” of women’s domination.<sup>257</sup> Describing the “mechanisms” around the silencing of women, created to maintain women’s “subordination”, she discusses its impact on women’s sense of self and agency.<sup>258</sup> She concludes that “control and regulation” around women’s communicative practices is a patriarchal tool of domination and power.<sup>259</sup> The women in her study often found themselves unable to either speak out or be heard, and themes of voice, silence, silencing and speaking arose constantly.<sup>260</sup> Like Justa’s story, this inability to be heard or get a response, the silencing and the silence, was a frequent experience. Yet silence was also described as the site of finding patience, courage and determination.<sup>261</sup> Hegde finds that when marginal voices are appropriated threatens the agency, determination and expression of those who are oppressed is threatened.<sup>262</sup> Hegde advises that matters of agency must be considered in communication studies and that resistance, which is at its core, is the “locus from which action can be initiated”.<sup>263</sup> This is a position from which meaning can be

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<sup>255</sup> Radha S. Hegde, “Narratives of silence: Rethinking gender, agency, and power from the communication experiences of battered women in South India,” *Communication Studies* 47, no. 4 (1996): 309, DOI: 10.1080/10510979609368485

<sup>256</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 309.

<sup>257</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 312.

<sup>258</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 304, 309.

<sup>259</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 312.

<sup>260</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 309.

<sup>261</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 307.

<sup>262</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 313.

<sup>263</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 310.

“constructed”, rather than simply found and experienced, enabling empowerment and agency.<sup>264</sup>

While it is Jesus who responds with silence, Justa refuses to remain silenced and unheard and she uses it as impetus to find her own voice. Her overwhelming need to access what Jesus has offered others, drives her to respond to his silence by finding her voice and establishing a new resistant relationship with the dominant power. If women are to be able to truly embrace God as relationship in “equality, mutuality and reciprocity”, they need to believe that God hears them and stands with them against oppression and abuse.<sup>265</sup>

### **7.1 Mute and Deaf, Absent or Hidden?**

One of the ways contemporary women may hear Jesus’ response is to question what it says about Divine Presence. For Lee the silence highlights the “muteness” and “deafness” of God, a theme well recognised in the spirituality of the Psalms, the laments, and the mystics.<sup>266</sup> The theology evident in Matthew’s Gospel lends acknowledgement to the experience of struggle, and the reassurance that God hears and responds to prayer even when the initial response seems to feel like discouragement and “abandonment”.<sup>267</sup> The silence does not continue, and Justa does find her answer but questions remain about whether the silence was response or the absence of response, whether the Divine is present within it or absent from it. Fiddes discusses the silence of the Divine and whether it is apophatic in nature, that is whether God is best described through absence and otherness.<sup>268</sup> Fiddes uses the story of Job’s suffering, in particular Job 28:12 about the place

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<sup>264</sup> Hegde, “Narratives of Silence”, 311.

<sup>265</sup> Moder, “Women, Personhood”, 103.

<sup>266</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 17, 18.

<sup>267</sup> Lee, “The faith of the Canaanite woman”, 18.

<sup>268</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, “The quest for a place which is ‘not-a-place’: the hiddenness of God and the presence of God,” in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, eds. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35, Accessed June 3, 2021. ProQuest eBook Central.



(or “not-a-place”) where wisdom and understanding dwell.<sup>269</sup> God, imaged here as wisdom, dwells in a place of understanding which is hidden to humans. Fiddes’ finds that God is more hidden than absent, which is relevant to how we read the silence of Jesus in the Matthean story. Because of close links between the older wisdom literature and Christology, this is relevant to how God is revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>270</sup> Fiddes states that in the end there is no absence, only “hidden presence”.<sup>271</sup> Rea agrees that the silence is not absence, and proposes that we seek “communion” rather than “communication” in our intimacy with God.<sup>272</sup> Rea appears to place the suffering which results from divine silence back onto the petitioner, finding the blame in the immaturity of the listener rather than God’s own unkindness.<sup>273</sup> Justa provides a challenge to this argument. Still, it seems that God is more hidden than absent and that connection with the Divine is sometimes deeper than words, perhaps even more present in the pauses between the words.

Jesus is initially silent and Berenice is totally silent through her lack of agency and her role as a static prop.<sup>274</sup> Silence communicates and Lawrence offers revelatory insights into its quality from the point of view of deafness.<sup>275</sup> Silent characters can be seen as “resistant” characters,<sup>276</sup> and rather than being passive, Berenice’s silence calls out the reader to challenge their own “ideologies” of health.<sup>277</sup> Her silence is witness in itself, to the wordiness and emphasis on hearing in the narrative.<sup>278</sup> If music is in the silence between the

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<sup>269</sup> Fiddes, “The Quest for a Place”, 35.

<sup>270</sup> Fiddes, “The Quest for a Place”, 35.

<sup>271</sup> Fiddes, “The Quest for a Place”, 42.

<sup>272</sup> Michael C. Rea, “Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence,” in *Philosophy of Religion: an Anthology*, eds. Louis P. Pojman & Michael C. Rea (Wadsworth: Cengage, 2011), 273.

<sup>273</sup> Rea, “Divine Hiddenness”, 273.

<sup>274</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 160.

<sup>275</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 155.

<sup>276</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 160.

<sup>277</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 160.

<sup>278</sup> Lawrence, “Reading Matthew’s Gospel”, 161.

notes rather than the notes themselves,<sup>279</sup> perhaps the true communication in language is in the silences between words.

Where is God in the silence? Following the lead of Justa, who stands as an avatar for women, I cannot help but see the stories of other women, and of myself, mirrored in her story. A woman who has suffered abuse in the places of power and privilege and taken the risk to speak truth to power, yet remains unheard, will notice Jesus' silence. I wonder whether God will utter a word for the refugee mother who pleads to the powerful for compassion on her child's need for a stable life in the embrace of a community who offers welcome. The silence will impact those who have been sexually assaulted and have been unable to speak their truth and be truly listened to, especially when the perpetrator is given voice. What texture does the silence weave when I have wailed my pain to God in the night and felt a palpable awareness that heaven is silent? Yet, I have heard the whisper of the solidarity of other women who have known the pain of no response, the mothers of the invisible and 'disappeared' children, the black lives who have not truly mattered. I hear the shared lament. The mothers of the incarcerated and the mothers of the addicted, together we wail our pain to the Divine and wait for an answer. It seems that the silence can hold a transformative quality.

## **Section 8: Exploring Transformational Space in the Silence**

Speaking always says something of "power, authority and love", but of what does silence speak?<sup>280</sup> It seems that it can be heard as dismissal, lack of worth, disregard and

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<sup>279</sup> The author of this idea is unclear, possibly Claude De Bussy or Mozart.

<sup>280</sup> Kerrie Handasyde, Rebekah Pryor, and Cathryn McKinney, eds. *Contemporary Feminist Theologies: Power, Authority, Love* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 11/193, eBook.

dismissal. However, it can also be the space of empowerment and respite, a place to gather resources and summon power.

The narrative concludes that Justa and Berenice are transformed by their experience. Jesus is also transformed by the experience. Perhaps those who witness the event and disciples through the ages are also transformed. Something happens in the silence that deepens the encounter and leads to a space of liminality. I suggest that Justa's lament leads to transformative outcomes, and that Justa finds that the silence gives her shelter as she regroups, steadies, and discovers the resources of empowerment within herself. Justa then uses her voice to challenge Jesus and to advocate for Berenice. Finally, the words are transformed into action through lament, shelter and restoration, and advocacy. This answers the third question of this thesis, finding transformational opportunity in the interaction between Justa and Jesus.

## 8.1 Lament

Justa shouts her pain despite the pressure to be silent. Silence is referred to as “the weaponised tool of preference” used by Christian communities in the face of sexism, racism, and classism.<sup>281</sup> Whether consciously or not, this silence ultimately is in support of the abusers. In the end there is no other option, says Soelle, we stand either with the “victim or the executioner”.<sup>282</sup>

Justa began the encounter with deep lament. The shared prayer of lament emerges as a tool of recovery. One element of lament is the cry which seeks to be heard by a, sometimes, silent God. Black women, like Justa in the story, use lament as a cry for help, to

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<sup>281</sup> Valerie Rane Landfair, “Complicity and silence: How Lament Could Lead us to a Better Place,” in *Womanist Theology: Unravelling the Double Bind of Racism and Sexism*, *Mutuality Magazine* (September 05, 2020): 25, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/complicity-and-silence-how-lament-could-lead-us-toward>

<sup>282</sup> Soelle, *Suffering*, 32.

grieve, vent their anger and fear and pain, in sighs and groans, in tears and silence.<sup>283</sup>

Klancher details a liturgy of lament and confession, based on Justa's cry, which is used by fifteenth century monks in "the Book of Hours of Sinai".<sup>284</sup>

Lament provides a valuable space of waiting and hope.<sup>285</sup> It is in the prayer of lament that a space opens where women of dominant classes can stand with black women and all those who are marginalised.<sup>286</sup> Breaking the silence holds complex issues for black women. White women are afforded greater voice but speaking up, for black women, migrant women, and colonized women, creates profound tensions in complex levels of marginalisation.<sup>287</sup> Justa the despised Canaanite, finds her voice and speaks out tenaciously in her desperation for something to change and her daughter to be made whole.

## 8.2 Shelter and Restoration

Silence may hold a sheltering place for restoration and recovery. John Wigger discusses the case of Jessica Hahn who was abused by two preachers including the televangelist, Jim Bakker.<sup>288</sup> Hahn was silent for seven years before she chose to speak out. When her story became a very public scandal, and she was treated with "scorn" by the media and silence by the church, she chose to withdraw again. While Bakker returned to the limelight with a strong voice, Hahn has retreated into silence, a "substitute for redemption", not believing that any respect would ever be given to her story.<sup>289</sup> Perhaps the

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<sup>283</sup> Landfair, *Complicity and silence*, 27.

<sup>284</sup> Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 262.

<sup>285</sup> Soelle, *Suffering*, 12, 16.

<sup>286</sup> Landfair, *Complicity and silence* 27.

<sup>287</sup> Ashwini Tambe, "Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo," *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 1 (2018): 197. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed June 7, 2021).

<sup>288</sup> John Wigger, "Jessica Hahn and Pentecostal Silence on Sexual Abuse," *PNEUMA* 41 (2019): 26-30, 10.1163/15700747-04101027.

<sup>289</sup> Wigger, "Jessica Hahn", 30.

silence can provide a momentary place of shelter<sup>290</sup>, but ultimately when silencing denies justice, the church must stand for the abused and vulnerable and give voice to the silenced.<sup>291</sup> As Capper suggests, it must stand beside women when they find the voice to wail and scream out their pain.<sup>292</sup>

### 8.3 Advocacy

Berenice finds voice through Justa but is never able to tell her own story and seek her own healing. She is wholly dependent on Justa's voice and her healing hinges on Jesus' response to Justa's pleas.<sup>293</sup> The relationship between them as peripheral characters is important, but little is said of it in the literature.<sup>294</sup> Justa finds her own voice in the activism of giving voice to Berenice. Berenice deserves to be more than just a 'prop', an absent character whose healing is peripheral to the plot. Her silence and suffering, and ultimately her transformation, deeply affect the implications of the story. The marginalisation of Justa and Berenice is multi-layered. While the story speaks of the marginalising of the disabled in already marginalised cultures, little comment has been made about this. I wonder what happens for those daughters who have no Justa to speak for them. The disabled among colonised and marginalised cultures are seriously under-resourced, disempowered, and rarely given full presence or personhood.<sup>295</sup>

Themes of silence and silencing are relevant issues for other contemporary women. A recent (2020) quantitative study into the effects of silence on sexual assault victims revealed

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<sup>290</sup> Explored extensively in Alison Woolley, *Women Choosing Silence: Relationality and Transformation in Spiritual Practice*. Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019) eBook.

<sup>291</sup> Wigger, "Jessica Hahn", 30.

<sup>292</sup> Christy Capper, 2018 speech UCA breakfast South Australia <https://vox.divinity.edu.au/opinion/progress-together-women-in-ministry/>

<sup>293</sup> Dickerson, "The Canaanite Woman", 73.

<sup>294</sup> Cadwallader, "Surprised by faith", 91, 92, alluding to this as same gender relationship.

<sup>295</sup> Royal commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Peoples with a Disability website- <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/exhibit/EXP.0020.0001.0001.pdf>

that protest and activism enabled its participants to find their voice and regain their power.<sup>296</sup> They described a process of moving from silence and shame around their sexual assault, to freedom and empowerment through finding voice, naming the abuse and calling out the perpetrator. Although a limited study, the conclusions present what helped or hindered healing for those involved. Feelings of overwhelm and disempowerment, as well as being a focus of media attention, were a hindrance. A growing depth of understanding of their experience, as well as validation and support were crucial for their recovery. They were empowered to seek what they needed for their healing. Activism provided the solidarity of good connections, the ability to assist others in their healing, and the freedom and courage to stand up and speak out. Finding their own voice was the ultimate key to their recovery.<sup>297</sup>

## Conclusion

In Matthew's account of Justa's story, Jesus and his disciples enter the stage in deep discussion. Justa emerges from the wings calling loudly in clear distress. The disciples are clearly agitated and ask Jesus to take action to be rid of her. Jesus stands mute before this cacophony in pregnant pause...

While opinions differ regarding the motivations behind Jesus' offering of no words in response to Justa's pain, the rudeness (punctuated by further insults) must be neither overlooked nor justified. Matthew uses it as a plot device to heighten the tension and increase the otherness of Justa, ultimately accentuating her inclusion. Justa's bold use of it

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<sup>296</sup> Charlotte Strauss Swanson, & Dawn Szymanski, "From pain to power: An exploration of activism, the #Metoo movement, and healing from sexual assault trauma," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 67 (2020): 653-657, 10.1037/cou0000429.

<sup>297</sup> Swanson, "From Pain", 654.

as gift and invitation to transformation emerge as key. However, the impacts of silence as a response continue to marginalise women and deepen their pain and suffering. When the silence is heard through the eyes of those who suffer and remain unheard the story offers new meaning. Justa's ongoing invitation to Jesus' disciples is to hear and respond to her compassionately and inclusively.

This study has addressed the three main questions suggesting that contemporary women are likely to hear the silence of Jesus' response through the lens of their own experiences of institutional silence. These women are likely to hear the silence as hesitancy or refusal to supply Justa's need and the withholding of privilege. The link between the silence of Jesus and the intended silencing of Justa may be heard by contemporary women through echoes of the times they also have been silenced. Justa offers a model of courage, compassion, and 'sass' as she uses her voice in the desperate desire for wholeness for her child. She refuses to let those who are privileged hide behind their systems of privilege. While the silence appears not to have been offered for Justa's benefit, she takes the moment to steady, to regroup and regather. She takes the moment she has been offered and makes a choice to be true to herself and her daughter despite the cost. She chooses empowerment. Like so many others she speaks not for herself alone.

While I have explored the links between Justa's story and contemporary women, further study might entail telling and gathering the stories of other women who hear themselves in her cries, who deserve to tell their own story.

The empowerment that Justa finds within the silence seems to be the vital transformative key. She finds this through lament, advocacy, and courage. Matthew's Gospel presents Justa's transformation from totally 'other' into a place of belonging. While I have shown that her inclusion and sense of belonging has its limits, she has been able to

meet and receive Christ in this moment. In finding and strengthening her own voice, Justa offers a model for the transformation and empowerment of contemporary women just as she has done for Berenice and Jesus.



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