Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself
before all those who stood by him,
and he cried out,
'Send everyone away from me.'

So no one stayed with him
when Joseph made himself known
to his brothers.

2 And he wept so loudly
that the Egyptians heard it,
and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers,
'I am Joseph.
Is my father still alive?'

But his brothers could not answer him,
so dismayed were they at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers,
'Come closer to me.'

And they came closer.

He said,
'I am your brother Joseph,
whom you sold into Egypt.
5 And now do not be distressed,
or angry with yourselves,
because you sold me here;
for God sent me before you
to preserve life.

6 For the famine has been in the land these two years;
and there are five more years
in which there will be
neither ploughing nor harvest.

7 God sent me before you
to preserve for you a remnant on earth,
and to keep alive for you many survivors.

8 So it was not you who sent me here,
but God;
he has made me a father to Pharaoh,
and lord of all his house
and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

9 Hurry and go up to my father
and say to him,
"Thus says your son Joseph,
God has made me lord of all Egypt;
come down to me,
do not delay.

10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen,
and you shall be near me,
you and your children
and your children's children,
as well as your flocks, your herds,
and all that you have.

11 I will provide for you there
—since there are five more years of famine to come—
so that you and your household,
and all that you have,
will not come to poverty."

[12]And now your eyes
and the eyes of my brother Benjamin
see that it is my own mouth
that speaks to you.

[13]You must tell my father
how greatly I am honoured in Egypt,
and all that you have seen.

Hurry and bring my father down here.'

[14]Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck
and wept,
while Benjamin wept upon his neck.

[15]And he kissed all his brothers
and wept upon them;
and after that
his brothers talked with him.

Matthew 15: 21-28

21 Jesus left that place
and went away
to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

[22]Just then a Canaanite woman
from that region
came out and started shouting,
'Have mercy on me,
Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is tormented
by a demon.'

[23]But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came
and urged him,
saying,
'Send her away,
for she keeps shouting after us.'

[24]He answered,
'I was sent only
to the lost sheep
of the house of Israel.'

[25]But she came
and knelt before him,
saying,
'Lord, help me.'

[26]He answered,
'It is not fair
to take the children's food
and throw it to the dogs.'

[27]She said,
'Yes, Lord,
yet even the dogs
eat the crumbs
that fall from their masters' table.'

[28]Then Jesus answered her,
'Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you
as you wish.'

And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reading Torah This Week

The cycle of Joseph stories culminates with this reunion
(the rest feels like denouement – but isn't!)
Last week, they sold him out –
This week, he takes them in

Joseph has risen from captivity,
to effectively rule Egypt for Pharaoh
The brothers have fallen into famine
reduced to beggars for handouts

Joseph toyed and played with them,
to force them to bring his full brother Benjamin,
manipulating their powerlessness,
before he 'comes out':
'I am your brother Joseph'

Joseph voices a rationale in vv.5, 7, 8:
God sent me before you
to preserve your life
to preserve a remnant
to make me Lord of Pharaoh

Beyond an individual tale of 12 brothers
it's an etiological legend about tribes
of a people comprised of groups
repeated through cycles of history
of division, conquest, captivity, exile, diaspora

What 'causes' anything, for what 'plan' or 'purpose'?
It can be reduced to one act of one agent,
and further to their subjective motivation at the time
or put in wider context,
ultimately seeking a divine providential order,
and recognizing prudent and imprudent responses.

Maimonides' 'Guide for the Perplexed'

about 1200 CE, under Islamic rule,
written in Arabic, in Morocco and Egypt
using Aristotelian frame for intercultural talk
opening/closing Part II, chapter 46

It is very clear that everything that is produced in time must necessarily have a proximate cause, which has produced it. in its turn that cause has a cause and so forth till finally one comes to the First Cause of all things, I mean God's will and free choice. For this reason all those intermediate causes are sometimes omitted in the dicta of the prophets, and an individual act produced in time is ascribed to God, it being aid that He, may He be exalted, has done it. …

Accordingly, it has become clear to you that in order to designate the shaping of the causes in whatever way they are shaped, whether they are causes by essence or by accident or by free choice or by volition, these five terms are used: namely, *to command, to say, to speak, to send, to call.* Know this and reflect upon it regarding every passage in the way that fits it …

Aristotle on four categories of 'cause';
Our modern technological culture focuses
on the empirical first category of what we see
and the mechanics of second category how it works,
and declines to speculate further…
accidental properties, not essential ones

1. Material Cause:
"that out of which" it is made.
2. Efficient Cause:
the source of the object's principle of change or stability.
3. Formal Cause:
the essence of the object.
4. Final Cause:
the end/goal of the object, or what the object is good for.

Reading Gospel This Week

The lectionary offers us the option of a longer lesson,
but let's focus on Jesus and the woman,
without the preface about clean and unclean

You can compare Mark 7:24-30,
and wonder whey Luke misses it
(John gives a whole chapter 4 to a different tale,
the Samaritan woman at the well)
but let's stick with Matthew's 'Canaanite' woman

Relocate Jesus from Galilee and the sea/lake
to Tyre and Sidon, up the Mediterranean coast,
further to the edge of 'our' territory
out into a mostly Gentile world

See and hear the shouting woman
Jesus' non-response,
disciples' appeal,
Jesus' refusal,
and her quieter closer appeal.

I read this as 'Jesus the bigot'
he's racializing the woman,
using the metaphor of 'dogs'
prioritizing his own people
and she responds 'even the dogs'

Compare Jesus' response 'great is your faith'
to last week's chiding of Peter 'how weak is your faith'
and Jesus' repentant change of response

Did Jesus start with a narrow view of his purpose,
then change it in response to challenge?
Could we?

We liberals are pretty fuzzy on the 'demon'
and the exorcism that effects healing
What was wrong – what was fixed?

Our assimilation traditions also skip the 'us' and 'them'
Jesus prioritizing the house of Israel and its lost sheep,
and ignoring other ethnicities

In turn, we jump too far in resolution –
as inclusion into a universalizing hegemony of 'us'
rather than conceding primacy to Israel,
and making space for 'even the dogs' after that

Did Jesus have to stop being Jewish?
Did the Canaanite women have to become Christian?
How can each retain their particularity,
and find a different relationship?

What's our narrower priority, as a body of Christ,
and what is our response beyond that scope and scale,
in helping, healing, right relations?

We've confused providence and progress too long,
mixed up healing with technological quick fixes
blinded by a generous liberal spirit to our colonizing
and missing the bigger story –
freedom from what,
freedom for what

original first cause…
ultimate final purpose…
the why questions