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Falling in love with another person seems to cloud your mind.

Love causes reasoned judgment to be temporarily suspended.

I talk with couples getting married.

I ask them how they handled their last argument.

Often times, they will tell me: "Oh, we've never argued. We haven't had any significant disagreements."

I will ask them to name one characteristic of the other that bothers them, and often they will be unable to do so.

Falling in love can sometimes blind you to the weaknesses of another.

Maybe that's OK.

Temporary blindness can be a good thing if it allows bondedness and affection and commitment to develop, before the real challenges to the relationship begin, the challenges of being two different people and having to work constantly to find a common middle ground.

Mature relationships, be it in marriage or friendships or work or congregational life, means that you stay connected to another even when the differences are clear.

Mature people have a forgiveness reflex, where they already plan to forgive even before offense is received.

Mature people look past the differences and see the goodness in others, and treat people based upon that goodness, even when behaviors aren't so good.

Once I heard a hospital chaplain describe human nature in a way that made sense to me.

The chaplain said that we function on three levels.

We spend most of our time on the first level, the surface level.

This is the part of ourselves that most people see.

We often doctor ourselves up a bit, presenting ourselves in a better light.

We try to be attractive and fashionable, charming and witty, gracious and competent.

The second level is hidden most of the time.

This is the level of our vulnerability, our brokenness.

At this level, we experience deeply fear, anxiety, guilt, loneliness.

This is the level of our hurts and our pain.  
Often we hide this part of ourselves, afraid of what other people might think if they knew us for who we really are, a scared little boy, a defeated little girl.  
When we fall in love, we often are attracted to the surface of another and blind to their vulnerable points.

The hospital chaplain said that there is a third level in people.  
You have to look past the surface level.  
You have to look past the hurt and vulnerability.  
This level is who you really are when you are stripped of everything else.  
This is who you really are in God's eyes.  
This is your bedrock. This is your foundation.  
Ultimately, it doesn't matter how prestigious your job is.  
It doesn't matter how color coordinated you are.  
It doesn't matter if your nose is not just right.  
The stuff that people see doesn't matter.  
It also doesn't matter if you live with lots of fear or guilt or brokenness.  
All of us do, in various degrees.  
What finally matters is that you are a child of God.  
You are forgiven in Christ.  
You are cared for by our heavenly Father.

In our Gospel story, the disciples did not understand this.  
They saw only the surface of the person who approached Jesus.  
She was a Canaanite.  
She was an insignificant person because she was not Jewish.  
They saw only the surface of this person; they did not see what God sees.

The woman came to Jesus in great distress. It was her daughter.  
She pleaded to Jesus for mercy, that he might heal her daughter.  
At first Jesus was silent.  
Why was he silent? The story doesn't tell us.  
My hunch is that he knew how this was going to play out, and the witness and truth that was going to be evident because of it.  
Jesus was silent, but the disciples were loud: "Get rid of her. She's annoying. She doesn't belong. She's not one of us. You owe her nothing. Move along, lady."  
Often the loudest people are the least hospitable.

Jesus finally said something: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This did not stop the woman.

She knelt before Jesus.

She asked again, "Lord, help me."

Notice that the disciples weren't kneeling before Jesus.

The disciples weren't asking for his help.

This woman was.

Then Jesus said, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."  
Dogs.

That was a derogatory term that Jews used to refer to non-Jewish people.

We still use that label in the same way today.

Why would Jesus use a derogatory term to refer to someone?

That seems inconsistent with his nature.

Unless he used that term for the benefit of others who were listening who were used to using that term.

The woman responded, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Yes, Lord, I'm a dog.

Yes, Lord, you're the master.

Yes, Lord, even the crumbs will be enough.

The crumbs, the extra, the unused portion, the leftovers, the unnecessary.

Even the crumbs will be enough.

Jesus said, "Great is your faith."

It is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus calls a person's faith great.

The only time.

Last week, we heard Jesus refer to Peter as "ye of little faith."

Peter, one of the inner circle of disciples, with Paul one of the two major leaders of the early church: little faith.

This Canaanite woman, this outsider, this non-Jew: great faith.

Listen carefully. Her nationality did not matter.

Her sex did not matter.

Her status as an outcast did not matter.

The fact that she was not respected by the disciples did not matter.

All the cultural boundaries established by people did not matter.  
All that you can see about this woman on the surface did not matter.  
Jesus saw who she really was.  
She was a child of God.  
She was in relationship with the Lord and Master.  
She knew where her wholeness and peace could be found.  
Bottom line, her bedrock, that was who she was.  
She knew it. Jesus knew it.

Who are the Canaanite women today?  
Who are the people for whom you have negative feelings?  
Who are the outsiders who do not deserve God's attention?  
Like the older brother of the prodigal son, we often dismiss people.  
We box people in based on appearance.  
We reject their behaviors, we question their motives, we doubt their values.  
We see all that is wrong with them by our standards.  
But God looks deeper than you and I do.  
I'm so happy about that.  
God sees who we really are.

When you look at people and things through God's eyes, it just opens you up.  
You see the bigger truth.  
God's love is for all people.  
God's mercy extends to all people.  
Jesus died on the cross for all people.  
Jesus was raised from the dead for all people.  
All people are called to faith.  
All people have gifts to serve.

That's not appearance.  
That's not even inner emotional workings.  
That is bedrock, the fundamental truth about people, and the ultimate truth  
about God.  
Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.