



Monthly Reflection, September 2015

Who do you say that I am?

Who do *you* say that I am? As children begin or return to school this September, as they meet new classmates, pick up their friendships and settle with new work and new teachers, they must redefine who they are afresh in relation to everyone around them. Who are the people to be trusted, who are the bullies, who are 'the best', who are the most popular or disliked, who are the true friends? Should you get in with a particular group? What about those you're told you shouldn't mix with, be friends with? Is it ok to be different?

Mark's story of Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman is remarkable in showing a Jesus who has to make those same decisions. Jesus holds out on the woman, - she's an outsider, not one of the 'entitled' group. But as he engages seriously with her, she convinces him that her child is also deserving of the same mercy as anyone else. In healing her daughter, Jesus breaks down barriers of privilege and pecking order and shows that God finds all children, irrespective of ethnicity, status or religion, to be worthy of love, compassion, and healing.

Mark also shows us that Jesus goes even further in breaking the boundaries of expected social norms. Angry with the disciples for clinging to ideas of status, reward and spiritual power, he does a radical thing in taking the little child, a nobody, and putting the child in front of him so that the disciples and the crowd have to notice, have to accept the place of the child. No one can now get to Jesus without first acknowledging the child in his arms. This is what the kingdom of God looks like. For the adults there, it is utterly unexpected, utterly shocking. This *child* gets to Jesus before me? How can that happen?

So this September, as children are negotiating the complex social boundaries of school, we too are challenged to set them an example. Is Jesus only for church-goers? For adults? Is Jesus for those who know the preferred answers to ethical issues or religious questions? Or is Jesus in fact challenging our own discipleship? Who are the people asking for crumbs in our own society, if not children living in poverty or neglect, child carers, runaways? Maybe, if we want to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we too should put the children first.