

A NOTE TO PARENTS

Nobody likes this story. The disciples don't come across well: "Send her away!" they say to Jesus, "She's bothering us." Jesus himself doesn't come across well. We can live with Jesus's sternness toward those who are arrogant, hypocritical or unkind, but here he is denying to her face a request for help from someone in deep personal trouble. How can we explain this to our children?

Jesus' wonders are secondary to his preaching: they are, as John describes them, "signs" of God's saving presence among us. Without that context, they will be misinterpreted; they will lose their whole purpose. But Jesus himself seems to be torn two ways in regard to his own healing power. Often, "moved by compassion," he allows himself to be deflected from his intention of preaching or of spending time in solitary prayer, and instead gives his whole attention to healing. At the marriage in Cana, though he first says, "What has this to do with me? The time is not right," yet ten minutes later there he is, saving the party by turning the water into wine. And the woman has merely to show that she does know something about the God of Israel, and he changes his mind: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you have asked."

What does this mean for us? When our prayers are granted, have we passed some kind of test? When they are denied, have we failed? Both of these are risky conclusions to draw, particularly with children, turning what should be a dynamic relationship with the living God into a series of set situations, with a right and wrong way to act. A better lesson is that each of these encounters in the Gospel is unique, showing a slightly different facet of Jesus' personality, a different context, a different individual approaching him. Our own situations are similarly unique. Our most important work in prayer is coming to know God simply for himself. He is not just a Force or a Source; he is a Person, with a distinct personality and style. Just as in any relationship of love, he may surprise us, baffle us, or seem to rebuff us; he will not always give us what we want. But, as the woman said to Jesus, he has enough love for all of us; and he wants us to keep asking.

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Year A
PROPER 15
TRACKS 1 and 2

*The Syro-Phoenician woman cried,
"Jesus! Son of David! Help me!"
But Jesus did not answer.*

MATTHEW 15:22-23



JESUS WAS IN A PLACE CALLED SYRO-PHOENICIA.

The woman begged him, "Help me! My daughter is very sick."



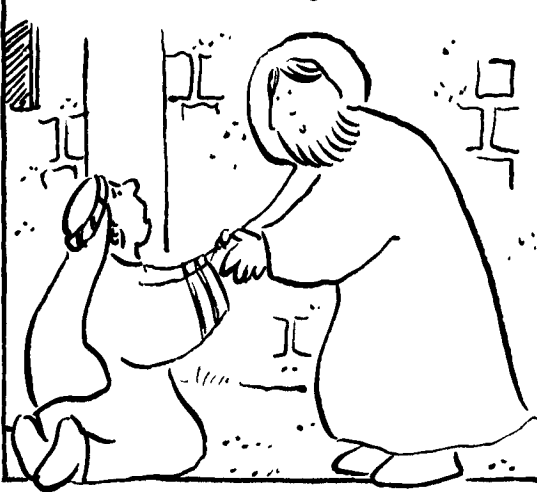
Jesus said, "I'm here to help the people of Israel. They know about God, but your people do not."



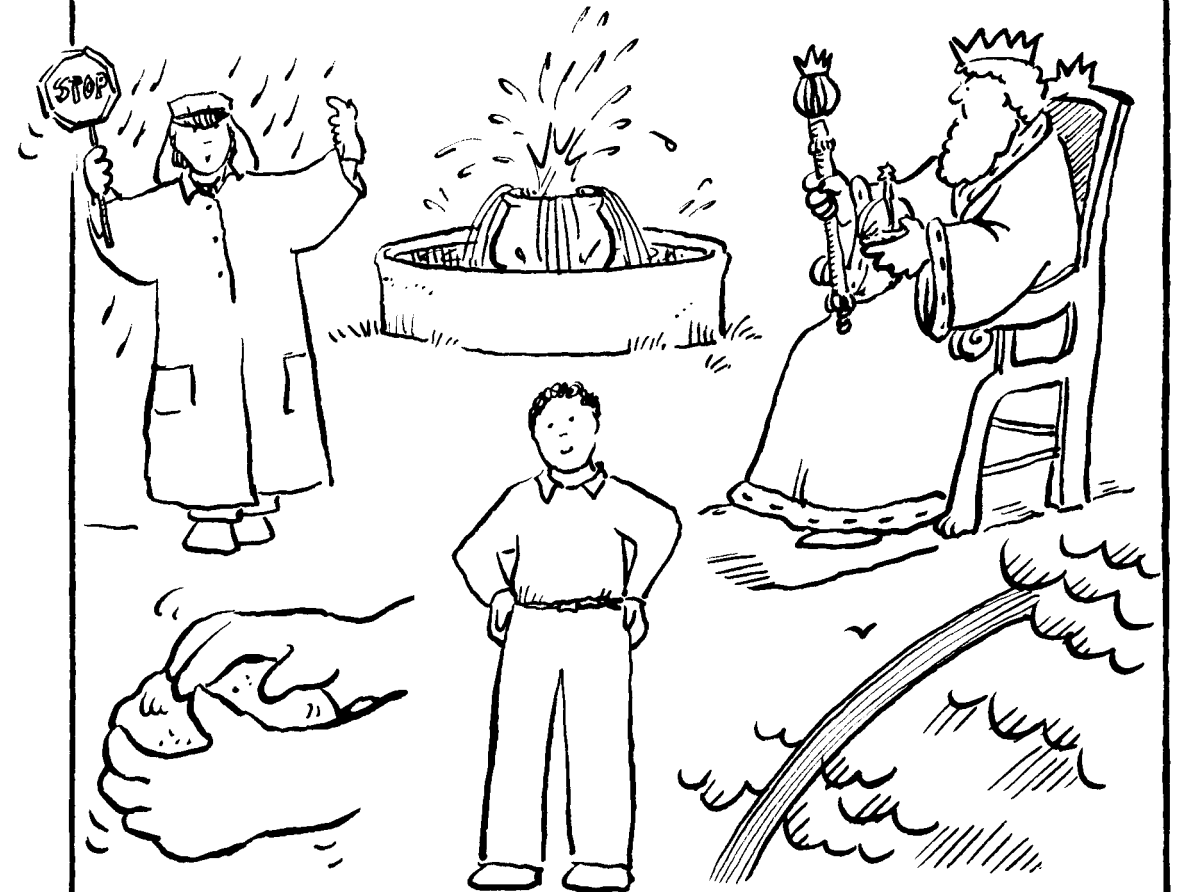
The woman said, "I know this about God: he has enough love for me too."



Jesus said, "You do know about God. Your daughter will get well."



Jesus did not want people to think he was just a magic man who could do amazing wonders. He wanted them to see that the wonderful things he did came from God's love. If they did not believe in God, they might not understand that. But the woman showed that she did understand!



Which of these pictures give good ideas of God?