



**Pestering God**  
**Cheryl Crichley**

This is an excerpt of a sermon given at Joy on August 18, 2002. It is based on the lectionary scriptures for that date, and focuses on the great faith of

the woman who "pestered" Jesus into healing her daughter. The larger questions that weave throughout these passages regarding the kingdom of God, Christianity (then and now), and God's favor, are these: Who is in? Who is out? Who can get it and how? The early church certainly struggled with these issues, as our current Sunday School study of Romans reveals.

These questions were around even in the Old Testament, and certainly they are relevant to today's church and today's society. The gift and the edict of Jesus, explained by Paul, seemed to be to extend the tent, stretch out the sides, lengthen the ropes, and move out the stakes, which was the theme of our recent conference in Texas. Yet we continue to struggle with questions of who can be let in and how they are brought in. In the end, it is to me, ALL can be let in...ANY could be left out...and this is by grace, a gift from God, which is claimed by faith. First, if we look at the texts: Psalms 67 decrees that all nations may be glad, because You rule the people justly and guide the nations of the earth. That God is fair and just to all groups of people is cause for rejoicing. In Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8, there is a call for people to "maintain justice and do what is right" for righteousness will soon be revealed. How much better would justice be maintained if we all, from government leaders to corporate executives to you and I, would just do what is right. There are sometimes very difficult problems to solve, when we may not know -which way to go, but more often than not, we know exactly what is the right thing to do. We only need to do it. We are also told here that foreigners who "do what is right," will be brought, by God, into the holy mountain and given joy in the house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices will be accepted (a cause for great concern during the time of sacrifices). He who gathers the exiles of Israel will gather still others to them, besides those already gathered. Again, a call to extend the tent.

Here in Elijah and God's conversation, we find some words of encouragement and a reproach for a lack of faith, that seem to tie this text to the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman. These words are especially important to those who strive for justice, for activists and peacemakers. Sometimes we may start to feel a little smug and self-righteous, or like Elijah, we may think that we are the only one left. ...poor me, I work so hard and no one understands. I may as well give up, since they want to kill me, also. God replied to Elijah that, chosen by grace, not by any works, was a remnant of 7, 000 who would not bow down to Baal. While Elijah was working and worrying, God was

doing something. The end result was by grace, not by works.

Not only was God doing something, he told Elijah that it was already done! We will return to the theme of grace, faith and works, and to the work already being done in the Matthew Story. Now to the New Testament: Romans 11:1-2,29-32. I would also like to include verses 3-6. We are told that God does not reject His own people. Bringing in new people does not kick out old ones...there is room for all, if we only extend the tent. We also find, that God's gift and his call are irrevocable.

Remember the story of Jonah? In many cases, we keep asking, "Oh, God, what do you want me to do," when we already know, we just hope that God might forget. ...or change his mind. The gift is irrevocable, but so is the call. God told Jonah, and will tell us, "I want you to do what I told you to do in the first place." Does this sound like a conversation you have had with your children or teenagers? To God, we must seem to never mature past adolescence. Now disobedience and mercy enter the scene. It is difficult to understand, if taken literally, that God would cause people to be disobedient just so he could show them mercy. Does God just want to show off at our expense? I believe the intent was, instead, to point out to those who considered themselves to be "in" that they had once been disobedient and were shown mercy. The same, therefore, would be shown to those who were still "out." Now to Matthew 15:10-28: This passage speaks about what is clean and unclean, which was used as a way to sort out the "them" from the "us," the "in" from the "out" ...again addressing this ongoing problem. Do you suppose that Paul was just weary, some days, of trying to explain this to the early churches? The question is asked over and over throughout history about different issues, and continues to be asked today. The recent discussion and vote at the Western District/South Central Mennonite meeting seemed to boil down to these same questions. ...who is in, who is out, who can get in and how, and would letting them in put the rest of us at risk of some sort of contamination? The answer here, with regard to clean & unclean food, is very interesting. These things go through you, and leave you. We know now that the nutrients and, unfortunately, sometimes the pollutants in what we take in can remain with us, physically at least, for some time. The point made here is that what is in our hearts and minds can be even more unclean, long lasting, and harmful. The message is, I believe, that if we are going to focus on the rules, the law, to set us apart and keep others out or put them down, we had better first check our own hearts and minds for purity of motive and intent. We should also seek the mind and will of God above our own ideas and our own will.

## August Revisited

You know how sometimes you can hardly believe the month is gone? This is one of those times. Aug. 11, our church increased by one. Roy

Evans has joined Joy Mennonite and increased our joy. Welcome, welcome, welcome! We celebrated with a potluck after the service and had a wonderful time.

That same Sunday was also a little sad. Jessica Warkentine left for college at Hesston, KS, that week. A little nervous, a little sad, a LOT excited! Fly, Jessie, fly!!!

This has been a month of goodbyes as well. Sadie Mast's sister, Lovina, passed away in Kalona, Iowa. As Sadie said a couple weeks ago, she will be sorely missed until we see her again.

## September Happenings and Coming Events

The weather is changing, crickets are singing, kids are back in school, must be September. Seems like this is one busy month and Joy Mennonite is no exception. Our

worship leader for the month will be Ralph Ediger and our preaching schedule is as follows: Sept. 1&8 - Moses Mast, Sept. 15&22 - Karin Evans, Sept. 29th Jonathan Majid. Mr. Majid grew up in Pakistan and understands the refugee situation in that part of the world. When the US bombing started, the plight of the refugees worsened. Mr. Majid's vision of Oklahomans helping our neighbors in Afghanistan started The Afghan Relief Fund. Please be prepared to give to MCC that Sunday. Remember, all donations are matched dollar for dollar.

On a bit wider screen, this month is also OK Convention at First Mennonite in Clinton, OK on Sept. 20 - 21. Fairview Mennonite Brethern will hosting the OK All Mennonite Women's Fellowship on Sept. 10th.

## Final Thoughts Deborah O'Neal

I read something this week that not a lot of people who aren't Mennonites will know. Well, several somethings. First, MCC is 82 years

old. Now, I know that MCC has been around for a while, but even I was surprised at 82 years. I guess that just means they know what they're doing and they're doing it well. Second, this year's MCC sale in Enid is the 25th. That's right, 25 years of Oklahomans supporting their neighbors near and far. That's pretty cool. I'm part of a whole bunch of "only one's", standing together to make a difference. Come and join the fun, food, and most important, the fellowship, at OK Mennonite Relief Sale, Nov. 1&2 at the Garfield County Fairgrounds in Enid.

Well, now I've run out of things to say except this one last thing. Remember those WWJD bracelets, bumper stickers, notebooks etc. of few years ago? Is that question not politically correct anymore? Personally, I don't think most folks want to do what Jesus would do. It's too hard, inconvenient, time consuming, blah, blah, blah, excuse, excuse, excuse. Look, I'm guilty too. Lots of times. My kids have a tendency to jerk me up short though and say that's not what we're supposed to do. Children usually do what they see, not what they are told, unless it's one of those times when it will make you feel guilty. Guess it goes right back to do what I told you to do, when I told you to do it. Yes, God.

Come see us, we miss you.

## JOY MENNONITE CHURCH 504 NE 16TH OKC OK 73104

Sunday Services 10:00 am Sunday School 11:30  
All are welcome, please join us as you are able



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