

Grace and peace to you from God, who knows our hearts, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the spirit come down, who together set the stage for healing and welcome.

In a fashion similar to our children's sermon this morning, I give you:

## Act I Scene I

The sounds of farm animals and the small chatter of people in the neighboring room can be heard in the background as our scene opens today. Jesus is lying down to rest after several action-filled days. He is sitting upright on a mound of wool blankets piled on a hard surface--his bed for the evening provided by an elderly couple willing to take him and his disciples in for the evening. He is rubbing his feet. They are sore from walking and riding some 40 miles to Tyre from the Sea of Galilee. He is also massaging his shoulders and neck, his body tense from his last few encounters with an entire onslaught of people. He is by himself talking out loud to his most trusted life source, God the Father. He is reflecting on his mission and the new insights he has gained along his journey thus far.

Jesus says: Father, I am exhausted after what has been a long journey to this strange and wondrous Gentile region. My body aches but it is my mind that feels weary. What you ask of me is so great. I have a hard time comprehending it myself sometimes. Is it possible that even I, your Son, can grow so tired that I lapse in judgment? Is it possible you've placed before me people with bigger hearts than myself who were sent to teach me the full scope of my mission? (Jesus chuckles) You are showing me new things and stretching me beyond what I thought were my limits. At one point, I thought I'd been sent to preach and teach the good news of your heart's yearning to only my people, the children of Israel. Yet, today you placed before me a woman from Syrophenicia, of all places, who I called a dog right to her face! Why did I do that? Is she not your child, too? As any strong woman concerned for her own child would do, she set me straight. Instead of me demonstrating your love, she showed your immense love to me--or more like slapped me across the face with it. I am humbled as I recount my interactions with this woman and others I've met over the last week or so. It's true, your love for your people knows no limits.

Jesus lays down and the lights are dimmed. They darken and the sounds of background noises expire.

End Scene.

Act I Scene II

Jesus and his accompanying party are outside the doorway of an elderly couple's home earlier that evening. This couple agreed to take them in so Jesus and his disciples could rest after their long journey from Gennesaret and the surrounding region of Galilee, where Jesus had been healing people by the hundreds. People were laying their sick friends and family members on the ground in marketplaces and town squares, awaiting Jesus' compassionate touch. All who were touched by Jesus were healed and Jesus' energy was zapped from him even as he departed for Tyre, some 40 miles away.

Peter and Andrew, Jesus' disciples, run to Jesus from stage right.

Peter says: Jesus, I think the coast is clear. I'm sure no one recognized you as we entered the town gates. We kept you well covered and this couple has agreed to house us for the evening. Please, go in and rest awhile. We will make your presence known here soon enough.

Jesus replies: Thank you, Peter. I do yearn for rest.

As Andrew knocks, an elderly couple appears and opens the door to greet them. A small fire is burning and a suspended pot of something smelling deliciously of herbs and broth is hissing above the flames. The sun is just setting and the couple has prepared for the darkness by lighting oil lamps, placing them in several nooks and crannies around their home. Jesus is immediately grateful for their hospitality.

The elderly woman speaks up: Welcome to our humble home, dear Jesus. We are honored to host you and your friends this night.

Her husband chimes in: Yes, do come in. You can set your belongings here. Your beds are this way.

Jesus says thank you and as the man turns to direct them to their beds, suddenly a woman--entering from stage left--appears in the doorway and walks in. She immediately bows at Jesus' feet.

She says: My deepest apologies, kind sir. My friends said they spotted you on your way into our small town. They recognized a few people in your party and they were sure it was you with them.

Jesus turns to Peter and Andrew and, out of pure exhaustion, rolls his eyes at them. He thinks, you disguised me but you didn't think to disguise yourselves? He turns back to the woman.

What is it you need, woman?

My daughter is ill. She says. She is not herself but a completely different person. She is not sleeping or eating. Her eyes are not the same. Her speech is twisted. It's like her soul has been taken right out of her and something else has taken its place. Jesus, please heal her. I want my daughter back. She needs to return to me.

She bows at Jesus' feet. Her voice is troubled and her eyes full of tears. Jesus looks at her and notices so many things about her that are outside the bounds of his context and culture. First, he notices she is "implicitly impure [according to his customs. She is] a Gentile of Syrophenician origin. [She is] one who lives outside of the land of Israel and outside of the law of Moses, a descendant of the ancient enemies of Israel. She is also a woman, unaccompanied by a husband or male relative, who initiates a conversation with him, a strange man — another taboo transgressed". Beyond any recognition of himself due to tiredness and a lack of will, Jesus responds:

"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Astonished at what she was hearing, this woman presses on. Her daughter was so sick and this moment, this man, they were too important not to say more, to speak up or say something that would change his mind. She'd heard so much about Jesus' healing heart. She was determined to stay. She was determined to fend for her daughter.

She said: Please sir, I'm begging you. Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. I know I am desolate. I know I am destitute. I come before you in need of your help. My daughter needs your nourishment, your healing touch, and grace. I am nothing in comparison to your regard for the children of Israel. But doesn't my daughter's illness mean anything to you? Does not your God have compassion for someone like me?

At hearing these words, Jesus snapped out of his tired state immediately. What am I doing?! He asked himself. Have I not come to open the door for healing and forgiveness for all? Have I not come to heal the sick and suffering, to set the stage for welcome, to set captives free? This humanly state of weariness has affected me beyond all self-recognition. I am not myself.

Jesus assured her: Yes, yes, of course, child. I do care deeply about your daughter and her sickness. I care about you. God the Father, my father and yours, cares so much about you.

Then, by invoking the power of God's spirit to bring healing to her daughter, Jesus said:

For saying what you have said you may go--the demon has left your daughter.

The Syrophenician woman hurries to exit at stage left and immediately returns home. The story goes she found her daughter still shaken but at peace with herself and her surroundings. They locked eyes and started to cry as they embraced one another. Together they prayed and gave thanks for Jesus and the grace he imparted upon them.

Returning back to the scene, Jesus turns to his disciples after the woman has made her exit.

He speaks: To admit your faults is the most generous and healing of acts. I freely admit my own lack of good judgment this night and humbly ask for the grace of my father to cover me like a blanket as I rest this eve. Good friends, may we go forth in good courage. Tomorrow will be another long day. I bid you goodnight. My body is weary but more so from my soul being born anew.

The disciples hug, shake hands, and leave Jesus to rest. For them, his conduct will serve as an example of humility and grace for years to come. The scene ends with soft music playing in the background, fading as the sounds of crickets emerge. The stage lighting turns downcast and then finally dark. End scene.

## Act II Scene I

The sun is up. Several people are lined up but spaced apart on the stage, in what looks like a town square. As an inspiring selection of music plays in the background, this scene is a montage of Jesus healing each and every person he encounters as he journeys from stage left to stage right. The sick are accompanied by friends and companions. They and Jesus' disciples react in awe as they watch Jesus work.

The first man Jesus heals is deaf and his speech has been stunted. Jesus touches his ears. He spits in his hands and touches the man's mouth. Immediately, the man's eyes are opened and he turns circles amazed while continually pointing out everything he sees anew. He talks to his friends and they hug him. They react with joy in their hearts and tears in their eyes.

Others along the way cannot walk and Jesus helps them up. Some carry their children on stage, placing them at Jesus' feet. He touches them and they arise.

A huge crowd has nothing to eat. Jesus breaks bread and feeds them.

As he journeys, each movement in this scene should highlight Jesus' way of healing people not just on the outside, but more importantly, from the inside out. In the distance on a hill above a sprawling city landscape, three crosses can be seen on a hill. Everything draws to a close with the crowds following Jesus off stage right. The lights dim, but a solo spotlight remains on the crosses. This way, the audience knows full well in their hearts, Christ's ministry has just begun.

End scene and with copious amounts of gratitude in their hearts, all God's children say, Amen!