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“Brutiful Discomfort”

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I have three things to share with you this morning: 1) a new word, 2) this story of Jesus cussing at a woman (calling her a dog), and 3) the discomfort of who we center and who we silence in resistance.

Tell me, did you look at your Order of Service wondering, “...*does our new intern know how to spell?*” The word is Brutiful. Have you heard this? It’s a mouthful. Let’s say it together: Brutiful. *I* didn’t make it up. Glennon Doyle says: “Life is brutal. But it’s also beautiful.” “Brutiful,” she calls it. “Life’s brutal and beautiful are woven together so tightly they can’t be separated.” In your life, have you experienced a brutiful moment? Yes. More than one, right? There are Brutiful threads in all of our stories.

Do you know the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman?...It’s confusing and uncomfortable. It’s about power and privilege...ordinary, holy encounters...the transformation of bringing our full, vulnerable selves into relationship with another. We might call it a brutiful story about resistance and hope.

Hope and resistance are about relationship. We sing them back to one another to sustain us through celebration and struggle. This worship, our ritual of welcoming babies...this religious community expresses sacred relationships. You invited *me* into relationship and *now*, you’re stuck in a pew listening to some *BIBLE* story about Jesus cussing! Relationships are not easy, are they? No. But, will you take a leap with me? Accompany me—to wrestle with this story and unpack the brutiful tensions of resistance and hope. Sound ok?

Could we call the Bible brutiful? I love the Bible, but I haven’t always. It’s not easy to love. Can you identify? The Bible doesn’t agree with *itself*,... so how can *we*?! Have you ever witnessed someone using the Bible to hurt people? Me too. It might seem easier to toss the whole thing out.

Stories in the Bible are sacred stories, though they are one pane of one window of the greater human story. All religious traditions have ancient, sacred stories. *Your* stories you carry inside your heart are sacred stories too. What does Jesus cussing offer up...as we think about comfort and discomfort, power and privilege, resistance and hope?

Here we have a woman, from a marginalized ethnic group, whose child was ill. Tormented by a demon could’ve meant suffering from psychosis or epilepsy. We don’t know. A child’s mother was desperate. Her pleas gave the disciples a headache. Disciples of Jesus were revolutionaries...justice advocates fighting against oppression. Maybe they were having a bad day or caught off guard, but this woman and her sick child did not fit the criteria.

The disciples felt uncomfortable. They saw her talking to Jesus and asserted their feelings. “Make her stop shouting at us! She’s angry. Hysterical! We could listen and help if she would calm down and be rational!” Sound familiar? Calm down. Stop being so angry. Express your

opinions in a way that makes me feel safe. Even revolutionaries miss the mark, silencing voices of our most vulnerable.

Where are you and I in this story? Who would *we* be? Can you locate yourself in the scene? The characters are the Canaanite woman and her daughter, plus Jesus and the disciples. If you could only choose one, which character would you play?

Are you Jesus, healer and freedom fighter for the oppressed...who needs *two QUIET* minutes to stop and lean against the well? Do you have to keep your focus on the big picture, even if it means ignoring someone's needs? Have you ever felt this way?

Are you the daughter...sick too long to remember feeling well. Wanting your mom close, to feed you soup, and rub your back...but she keeps running off?

Are you a disciple...feeling unsafe, uncomfortable...fed up with loud, angry people?

Are you the Canaanite woman? Frightened, exhausted...pounding doors to advocate for your child, failing to access medical care they need...desperate for a miracle?

Thinking about your life, can you recall a time *you* felt like one of *them*? Might we, at some point, identify with ALL of them? ...Life after all is brutiful.

Where does this relate to resistance and practicing hope? We resist many things. We resist isolation, choosing to be present in community. People we know might feel hopeless, but we resist it. We practice hope, dedicating babies to our faith tradition...where we *define* truth differently, but seek meaning together, in relationship.

Have you seen “#Resist” on social media and church sandwich boards? How does this word speak to you? Are we all exerting an opposing force or taking a stand against the same things? Are the risks of our resistance equitable? Or does it depend how comfortable we are?

Resistance might mean staying alive day after day, inside a system relentlessly trying to destroy you. Thriving in a nation wherein half the population thinks the Jim Crow era was “great,” is resistance. Raising joyful, hopeful children is resistance, in these times we live in, today. *Your* resistance might happen in unscripted, brutiful places.

Resistance is uncomfortable. We are familiar with discomfort. And depending on our social location, we may hear, especially in Unitarian Universalist spaces, an invitation to “get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Have you heard this?

How do we distinguish discomfort that expands and transforms us from discomfort that diminishes and constricts? How many of you, upon *entering* a room have already identified all the exits? These are my people! But that's NOT expansive and transformational discomfort, is it? Those are survival skills. Fire alarm goes off, I'm following you! But resistance and the practice of hope call us to embrace a different sort of discomfort...Expansive, transformational, brutiful discomfort.

Instead of planning escape routes, expansive discomfort takes the focus off me and my survival techniques. Transformational discomfort moves *my* experience out of the center, inviting me to look through a new lens. And like those first hours adjusting to a new optical prescription...my eyes might feel sore. Brutiful discomfort takes getting used to.

Resistance doesn't happen on schedule. We get invited to resist or exert an opposing force or take a stand when *least* convenient. Perhaps, you go down to draw water from the well, and find a holy person standing before you... Have you had some of these unexpected, pivotal moments in your life?

The Canaanite women didn't know she would come face to face with Jesus that day. She had looked everywhere for help, doors closed in her face, yet still believing she and her daughter were worthy. The disciples didn't like her uppity assertiveness and Jesus completely ignored her. So she got down on her knees and begged for someone—this particular someone—to take notice of her child's suffering. And this is where the story turns outrageous.

Jesus didn't think he had a relationship with the Canaanite woman. I am here for my own people, he said. I can't take their food and give it to a dog. ...A DOG? Hold on a second. This is where I stand back and think: Wow, Jesus! You kiss your mama with that mouth? What is going on with him?

Imagine *being* the woman Jesus cussed at? What if the story ended here? If the Canaanite woman simply went home? Who would've believed her, if she told them Jesus called her an offensive name? Can you imagine the response? "Wait...WHAT...Jesus?! The guy who's always helping people? No! You must have misheard him. He didn't mean it *that* way. Look at all the good work he does in the community, healing people, breaking up Temple racketeering. You're imagining things. I don't believe you."

That wasn't the ending. This was a wise woman. Her wisdom was hard won. She was fast on her feet. She'd probably heard worse than a holy man swearing. Perhaps she said under her breath, "is that all you've got?" She turned *his* crass and cold words right back around. Her words held up a mirror to Jesus. "*Even the dogs get crumbs...*" She roused him from his numbness...resisted his apathy. She helped him *remember* their relationship.

Power and privilege are leveraged here in surprising, brutiful ways. The disciples used theirs to silence the Canaanite woman, convince Jesus to ignore her needs. They felt uncomfortable. Jesus's disciples were resisters...but they were accustomed to having choice. The Canaanite woman...maybe *less* familiar with privilege and comfort and scheduled resistance. But, she leaned into her fear and stood her sacred ground.

I wonder...where can we find *our* motivation to exert that opposing force...to resist supporting injustice and lean into the brutiful discomfort? The Canaanite woman was motivated because her daughter was dying. Around us, *too*, people are dying. We need more than crumbs from the table to save them. Can we cast our hope on the transformative power of relationship?

Remember being a young child? Ever watched a young child catch a whiff of injustice? It brings them up short. Things are supposed to be fair! If a young child hears someone being mean, they throw themselves into the situation, to aid the victim. Do they stop to tie back their hair, take off their earrings and rub the Vaseline on their face? No! They accept their hair might get pulled, their cheek might get scratched and they might even get an earring pulled out...BUT IT'S WORTH IT to stop someone from getting hurt.

Let's be clear, I'm not advocating physical violence. But we must realize our own safety and comfort often come at the price of someone else's. Some of us who are white—some of us who are light-skinned enough to pass—too often get to ignore the brutality of the systems of this world we live in. We move through the world more protected, choosing when and where and *why* to resist.

Could *we* all become like the little children...as Jesus advised on one of his *better* days? Could the *truth* of injustice cause us more pain than anticipated discomfort of interrupting it? What if we leaned harder into discomfort and said NO MORE!

I'm not free until everyone is free. I'm not safe until everyone is safe. When you terrorize *any* of my siblings, you are wounding me. Their salvation is bound to mine. We belong to each other.

But, friends, we are also bound to whoever we define as the oppressor. There could be times *we* play that role. We are called to love them too. They might not like it. It might not feel good. Because loving and saving "the oppressor" means interrupting indifference, disrupting the narrative of otherness, refusing to quietly support hatred. We know love and kindness are not the same as nice and polite. Being open to the transformation of relationship means we show up to these difficult, unexpected invitations. We resist with the fullness of everything we are in the world.

As liberal religious people, we're prepared for discomfort. We value pluralism and the democratic process...we bring different experiences, ethnicities and beliefs to bear on the covenants we make, the ways we embody our religious principles. We look for who is missing from the table and listen for the voices being silenced. We have Good News for the world and the world needs it.

Let us look for the quiet invitations in our lives, where we are invited to stand up or kneel down for what is just. Transformation happens in these small, brutiful moments of resistance...not in grand gestures of opposing force...but in holy, every day encounters where we stand our sacred ground and call one another back into relationship.

May we each embody the strength of the Canaanite woman and the reckless courage of young children...
together, may we lean into the brutiful discomfort.
Amen.