

Teenager. Grandfather. Politician. Say the word and some thoughts come to mind.

Texan, New Yorker, Californian. Which would you match with a three piece suit? Cowboy boots?

Sunglasses?

And what labels might pop into your mind when you hear Polish, Latino, Jewish?

But now think of a teenager that you know. A person who is a grandfather. Someone who holds elective office.

Do you know someone who lives in California, or Texas or New York?

Or someone who is of Jewish ancestry, Polish, Latino?

What happens to the labels when a real person is in mind? Sometimes the labels get stretched or even torn.

Today is a label stretching day when it comes to the gospel reading. First we read: From there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there.

What's going on here? Jesus is supposed to be out looking for people, winning them over to God. But here he is hiding out in a foreign land. But not for long.

Mark writes, "Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now this woman was a Gentile of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter."

Jesus' vacation was over. This woman came into his private retreat with no invitation. Barged right in and started begging. It is bad enough when you can't walk a few downtown blocks without someone begging of you but this woman came right into the house.

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

Dogs. That is how some Jewish people labeled the Gentiles. Dogs. The Jewish people were God's chosen children. All the rest? – dogs. But this word is on Jesus' lips.

Now that is a label stretcher. All the goodness and compassion and love and kindness of Jesus is stretched by that one word. What will we do?

Here's what that woman did – “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” Then Jesus said to her, “For saying that you may go – the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.”

If labels are our interest we have a big problem here – we need to explain away what Jesus did. We will find ourselves defending Jesus.

I think of funerals. Sometimes it is enough to tell stories about the one who has died. Not trying to prove this or that about the person. Just stories.

But sometimes families have a need to create a label for the life that was lived. And then life starts to get bent and twisted to fit on that label.

For the most part the gospels do not label Jesus. They simply tell stories. Even some difficult stories.

I won't explain away Jesus very harsh words for this woman – nor that he was trying to get away from all the needy people. Neither I nor any other person can know what was in Jesus' mind that day. But I do know that this woman who was face to face with Jesus recognized that Jesus was hope for her daughter. She was not disappointed.

Will Jesus heal your daughter when she is sick? Who knows? Maybe yes – maybe no. Anyone who puts a label on Jesus that says if you do this or that Jesus will do that healing is lying – that much I know.

And even more I know that if you put your hope in Jesus, you will be all right. Not hope in labels about Jesus but hope in the living Lord, Jesus. Daily talking with him – carrying in your heart his words and deeds and

cross. Week after week you will meet him at the table and he will fill you with himself. If something he does or fails to do confuses you, you will be all right for you trust in him.