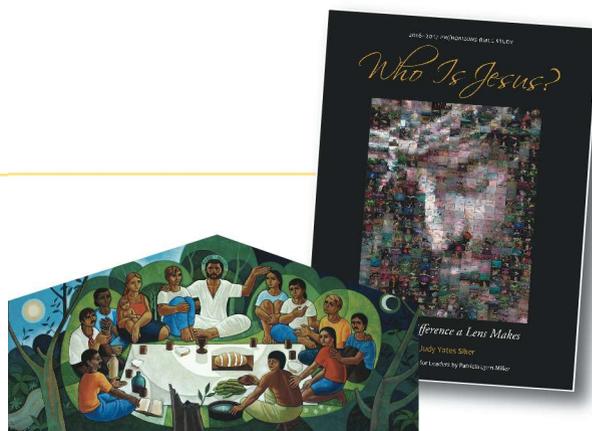


## Seeing Beyond the Canon

BY KATIE MULLIGAN

For use with Lesson Nine of the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker



Scripture: Matthew 15:21–28

“... she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’” (Matt. 15:25).

I first came to church and Sunday school as a teenager. Growing up, I had attended the occasional Easter or Christmas service at random churches, but a scout friend invited me to her church’s youth group in high school, and after a little while I began to attend her church.

Most of the other youth had been coming to that church for their entire lives, so they were well used to the Sunday school routines. They knew where the classroom was, who was teaching which week, how long we stayed in worship, where to bring an offering, how to receive communion. I was unsure of everything, as a guest of the church. I did not want to be known as a guest, so I rarely asked about the routines.

One day, the teacher called out for us to open our Bibles and turn to a passage in 1 John. I stumbled through my Bible, desperately trying to find the passage without asking someone else. Quickly, the rest of the group had found their page, and I was still rifling through. One of my friends said, “It’s page 191!” I quickly turned to that page and found myself lost in an Old Testament passage. Someone laughed and said, “No, the *other* page 191. The New Testament is in the back.”

Embarrassed, I cried out, “I just don’t understand why these books aren’t in alphabetical order!”

That was more than 30 years ago, yet I still have days when I feel like a stranger in the church. I have served the church in different capacities over those decades, participated in countless worship services, and I can now easily find most scripture passages without the alphabetical index. But there are still days when I feel awkward, outside, different.

But on those days, those awkward, strange days, I take comfort in knowing there are passages that tell the story of the Caananite woman and so many other outsiders who are welcomed in. I take comfort in knowing that on those days I find new meanings in scripture.

On those awkward, strange days, what holds my faith is the cry of an outsider woman who said, “Lord, help me!” And through her faith and persistence, her cry was answered. And I remember that although none of the people in that Sunday school class shared my confusion about the Bible, the church and liturgy, they cared for me anyway. The youth and the people of that church loved me through some of the hardest days of my life, despite the fact that I was other and outside. My prayers, too, were answered.

## Questions

1. What times or ways have you felt “outside” the church or a “stranger” to church traditions? Consider both practices and knowledge and differences between your understanding of theology and the church's teachings?
2. How does it feel to be separate or different? Consider how you felt in the moment and following.
3. What insights do you gain from your own experience of being a stranger, either within the church or in another context?
4. In what ways is Jesus a stranger to us?

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abide, these three;  
but the greatest  
of these is love.”

— 1 Corinthians 13:13

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