

"Great is Your Faith"

Dear members of First English,

In the Gospel for this Sunday, Matthew 15:21-28, Jesus enters a region of the Gentiles, people not like Jesus or his fellow Jewish disciples. These Gentiles have a different history and don't worship or eat like Jesus. On that day, maybe Jesus just wants to be left alone. But a Canaanite woman calls out to him for help. The disciples know they aren't supposed to associate with Canaanites--they're "unclean" and don't worship the God of Israel. But there she is, desperately crying, **"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; help me! My daughter is not well."**

Jesus doesn't say anything. But the woman persists. Some of the disciples ask Jesus to send her away. Then **Jesus, sounding a little callous, says, "I was sent to the children of Israel. It's not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs."** Maybe Jesus is feeling grumpy. Perhaps he is testing her. Maybe the human side of Jesus made a mistake.

Then this quick-witted woman says, "But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." ("Even we Canannites should get some crumbs of grace.") The disciples' mouths probably fell open as they heard her talk back to the Lord. But it was courageous of her. And **Jesus was moved by the woman's persistence and her "great faith"**. And he granted her the mercy she asked for. He healed her daughter.

This story teaches us that faith sometimes involves persistence and challenging prejudices. This Canaanite woman was in a long line of biblical figures who won't take "no" for an answer, who, like Jacob, wrestled with the Lord until receiving a blessing.

I wonder who the Canaanite woman is today? Maybe she is one of the 1-in-6 Americans who don't have enough food to eat. Perhaps she is one of the millions who face domestic violence, or maybe one of the millions who live with mental illness or addiction. How often are we like the disciples, trying to ignore these problems? Sometimes we even get a little defensive having injustices pointed out to us. Or, maybe you've been on the other side, ignored or dismissed when asking for help, feeling like you are not being heard. **We live in a world in which people are hungry--physically and spiritually. People long for love and purpose and spiritual direction. "Lord, have mercy on me!"**

The good news is that, in spite of his initial response, Jesus does hear the woman, affirms her "great faith," and heals her daughter. God hears the person in need. God hears you in the midst of your struggles and doubts and anxieties--including now, in the midst of this pandemic. **God hears you! Keep trusting, like that Canaanite woman. Don't give up when you are calling on the Lord.**

It's amazing how God can use unexpected people, like that Canaanite woman, to bring about change. God is always surprising us, broadening the scope of his love in our world, widening the circle of grace. **I'm thankful for that woman, because through her determination and courage we glimpse a part of God's vision for the world--**where God's grace comes in unexpected ways, where outsiders are heard, and where every single one of us receives the gift of life---life now and life with God forever.

Yours in the life-giving love of Christ,
Pastor

Steve