

SERMON TITLE  
Sunday Pentecost 11, Year A  
Isaiah 56: 1; 6 – 8; Romans 11: 1-2a, 13-15, 28-35; **Matthew 15: 21 – 28**  
August 16, 2020

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*“But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”<sup>26</sup> And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.””*

WOW, Jesus! Way to not make this woman feel loved. This story seems to fly in the face of everything I know about Jesus and the promises He has given. “For God so loved the world...except that one Canaanite woman who He called a dog and denied her request for help...”

Yet, actually, there is a lot of meaningful stuff going on here.

I mean, first of all, how many times have we seemingly felt the stiff arm of Jesus? So much going on that it seems Jesus is checking His email anymore, the phone is off the hook, the voicemail box is full, or He is just too busy to care.

How many times have we been at our wits end and we cry out, “Lord, help me,” just like this Canaanite woman, only to hear nothing, not even our echo, in return? Silence. Deafening sound of silence.

But, what we need to realize, first of all, is that it is not all about us. We have a very ‘me’ centered kind of faith. If God won’t listen to me and do what I want, then He must not care, or maybe He isn’t even there at all.

But, let me tell you about this woman that Matthew tells us about today; this Canaanite woman.

First, she comes to Jesus, not for herself...not that there is anything wrong with coming to Jesus for ourselves. But, she comes because her daughter is afflicted by evil. She recognizes

that there is something beyond her control, beyond her ability to cure. So, she goes to the only one who can help. That takes faith.

Second, she is a Canaanite. The Canaanites were despised by the Jews. If you remember in the Old Testament God had commanded the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites, to leave none of them alive. They were a pagan people. They did atrocious things in the worship of their false gods Baal and Asherah. Things that I'd rather not get into here.

God knew that His people would be corrupted and led astray but their worship. And they were. The Israelites did not wipe out the Canaanites and they combined their atrocious practices with worship of God.

Therefore, the Israelites had learned to despise the Canaanites. And we see this in the disciples response to her, "*And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."*" Just looking at the text, without the historical context, would put Jesus AND the disciples as hateful and uncaring people.

But, while the disciples carried with them this Old Testament hatred for the pagan Canaanite people, Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach the disciples something. And, what He teaches them, and us, is truly magnificent.

He tells her that He only came for the lost sheep of Israel. Her only reply is to ask again. Notices, she doesn't deny His claim. She doesn't reference her conversion, if there was any, to Judaism. She doesn't proclaim that she has renounced her heritage, or point to her works. No, she simply comes to Him, this time on her knees and asks again. As this story moves along, she takes on more and more humility.

"Lord, help me." And, Jesus replies, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Notice, when she replies, that again, she doesn't point to her tithing record. Her church attendance. Her work in the soup kitchen or volunteering for VBS. She accepts the fact that she is a dog. A despised creature to the Jew. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Notice, she is now a dog under the table. Yet, she is begging from Jesus. She knows that He is her master. She wants just a taste of what might fall from His table. She isn't asking for everything, just what the Master will give her. She is only asking for crumbs.

Another neat thing here is this. It was only a chapter ago that Jesus had fed the 5,000. Notice that Jesus fully fed everyone that was there. None of them left hungry. In fact, they were all satisfied. They were stuffed.

And there is one little tidbit of information that is left dangling at the end of this story, "*And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over*" (Mt. 14:20). Starting with five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed over 5,000 people until they were satisfied. And, then, there were twelve baskets full of left overs.

Have you found the tie in to the story of the Canaanite 'dog' woman, yet? She is asking for those leftovers. She isn't wanting to take anything away from the Jews, she simply knows that there is enough 'left over', the crumbs, that she can save her daughter!

She knew she was a Canaanite. She knew He was an Israelite. She knew the risk of it. She knew she didn't deserve it. Yet, she believed that Jesus could and would help her.

And, guess what... He did! "*O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.*" Not, "O dog, how great are your works." No, Jesus rehumanizes her, "O woman." And, He acknowledges her faith.

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn 3:16-18).*

God is not interested in where we came from, where we’ve been, what we’ve done... good or bad. God is interested in you.

Only two people in the book of Matthew are praised for their faith. None of them are Jews. None of them are disciples. Both of them were Gentiles.

Jesus slapped the disciples with a reality check that day. They had learned to hate the Canaanites. They had learned to see them as less than... as dogs. And, in doing that, they automatically saw themselves as superior... as masters. Here, Jesus reminds us that we are all dogs. We are all begging for crumbs. We are all undeserving to sit at the Master’s table and eat with Him. Yet, that is exactly what He has us do.

We are invited to *“taste and see that the Lord is good”* (Ps. 34:8). He has *“prepare[d] a table before me in the presence of my enemies”* (Ps. 23:5). He has given us a foretaste of the feast to come...the marriage feast of the Lamb, in His kingdom that has no end...

For now, it feels as if we only get the crumbs. And, in some ways, I guess we do. Because, we are still waiting for the Master to come. We wait, patiently, for Him to set all things right.

On that day, all our prayers will be answered. All our tears will be gone. Reunions will happen. Peace will reign. Our God will show that He is truly triumphant. And those, who have humbly been eating the crumbs from under His table, will sit with Him and dine like royalty.

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going”*  
(Jn. 14:2-4).

*Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Amen.*