

[OPENING SLIDE]

"The Face of Love"

"Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly."

"There is [a] kind of love that doesn't look for value in what it loves, but that (actually) 'creates' value in what it loves." [Ian Pitt-Watson, A Primer for Preachers]

Introduction

"I've always believed in numbers, and the equations and logics that lead to reason, but after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask what truly is logic? Who decides reason?"

[SLIDE # 2] So asked Nobel Prize recipient John Nash, when he received the Nobel Prize for Economics [1994]. Nash, suffering from schizophrenia, was the subject of the Academy Award winning movie *A Beautiful Mind*. Where, *"through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional and back,"* he discovered what he called the most important discovery of his life and career. He said, *"It is only in the mysterious equations of love, that any logical reason can be found."*

It is this love that we behold in the face of Jesus! Where, in the face of all that was logical or reasonable, a woman in need comes face to face with love ... love that defies the norm, love that flies in the face of convention, love that always has folks like you and me in its sights ... the love of a Savior for all.

Main Point: Faithful discipleship is not measured "by how many perfect attendance badges one earns for Sunday school or worship, how often one has read the Bible from cover to cover, or how much money one contributes to the church treasury. Purity and faithfulness are shown ultimately by how the church speaks and lives out the radical hospitality and love of Christ."

[Charles, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:358]

[SLIDE # 3] Let us rejoice in this love – Christ's for us, ours towards others!

LOVE HAS A FACE. ITS NAME IS JESUS!

Amen.

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[SLIDE # 4] Regarding our text this morning, Martin Luther once remarked:
"Nowhere in all of the Gospels is Christ painted as being so hard as here."

Yes, let's get it out on the table: "This passage has a demon," says one commentator – ignoring a desperate mother, racist disciples, no mission to the Gentiles ... capped off with an apparent insult. I mean, if there ever was a Spirit-filled moment for us to struggle together through a section of God's Word, this is it! [Hollingsworth, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:359]

So let's go! Like Jacob, wrestled the angel, where the 1st thing we behold is that ...

[SLIDE # 5] LOVE GOES OUT OF ITS WAY.

²¹ ***And Jesus went away from there*** [i.e. the region of Galilee¹] ***and withdrew*** [off the beaten path] ***to the district of Tyre and Sidon*** [roughly 100 miles roundtrip].

²² ***And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region*** [three strikes against her from the start²] ***came out and was crying, "Have mercy*** [the key to this passage³] ***on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."***

"No matter how great the affliction of our children, relatives, friends, enemies – they do not dissolve our obligation to them and certainly ought neither to alienate our affection from them." [Matthew Henry]

That is to say, this woman, like anyone of us, at any given time in our lives, finds herself in deep need. Yes, any of us who have had children [or anyone else for whom we cared deeply], have, at one point or another, cried out just as she did. Where, whatever else that we may glean from this inspired Word, let this not be lost: Jesus intentionally here, to meet her – as He meets us where we are ... for one soul in need ... for you, child of God, for you!

Yes, with the battle lines drawn – it's great David's greater Son v. a demon [no contest!], but a life/death struggle for her/our very life ... who doesn't back down! It's a fight for which He is willing to go to the mat ... or a cross ... for her ... for you!

¹ Matthew 14:34; a trek of about 50 miles.

² Ethnicity, heritage, religion and gender; with two more forthcoming – her breach of social protocol, and being a mother to a demoniac. [Lee, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:361] The Canaanites were descendants of Ham, Noah's cursed son [Genesis 9:25; 15:16]

³ "The way that God has determined to be God." [Russell-Jones, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:360, summarizing Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 218f]

Yes, if there was ever a face of love, this is it. His is it!

[SLIDE # 6] Where, 2nd ... GOD'S LOVE IN CHRIST IS NEVER A "NO."

23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." ***24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*** ***25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me [a prayer Peter himself had just uttered as he was going down⁴]."*** ***26 And he answered [I believe more for his racist disciples, than for the woman], "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."***⁵

What is life-altering is what Jesus *doesn't* do here. He never says, "No." And any day that God doesn't outright say "No" to us in our sin is a good day. Amen?

In fact, look through the pages of Holy Scripture. When, if ever, do we find a soul seeking a Savior, and that Savior saying, "Not today?" Yes, the Father's missionary heart has been beating since the Garden of Eden. Never has He completely turned His back on this planet.

"As surely as God is faithful ... Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you ... is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him." [2 Corinthians 1:18-20]

So love – aka Jesus – goes out of its way. Love – aka Jesus – doesn't say "No."

[SLIDE # 7] Wherein, 3rd ... LOVE ALWAYS GOES THE DISTANCE.

27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ***28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith [contra the disciples]! Be it done for you as you desire."*** And her daughter was healed instantly.

"Is this not a masterpiece?" Trapping Jesus in His own words ... "How can Christ get out of this?" [Luther] How? By answering the woman's prayer. And ours ...

"Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."
[Matthew 11:28]

Come to me all who by reason of their sin, or guilt, by reason of their pain or grief who need a place to rest their heads. Come to *Me*. Be refreshed in ... *Me*.

⁴ Matthew 14:30

⁵ Yes! Referring to this woman as a dog has "the same tone as if it were shouted today in a high-school hallway." [Hollingsworth, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:361]

Wherein, there are no crumbs here! But a feast! Not unlike the Table we will be venturing towards in a few moments. A little bread ... a small sip of wine. Crumbs? No! However, "Forgiveness. Life. Salvation." No mere "table scraps." But a feast if there ever was one. [Nielsen, *CJ*, July 1996, 310] A cruciform love that delivers what we do not deserve, and a love that annihilates the very thing we did – sin, death, hell! Love, now come our way by a great grace ... a grace that says to all who come ...

[SLIDE # 8] EVEN DOGS ARE LOVED!

Stirring up gratitude. Stirring up joy. Hurrah!

But then also stirring up questions: What would it mean if we went out of *our* ... didn't say "no" ... went the distance? "[T]o fret less about how 'we have always done it this way' and listen more to the cries of those whom tradition considers 'unclean' or 'unwanted'?" [Charles, 360]

Like with this anonymous woman – this Canaanite canine – who, like us, doesn't deserve a place at the Master's Table, but is given one, how far would we go to bring others in? Meeting folks on their turf, in their need, with the face of love that we ourselves rejoice to behold?

[SLIDE # 9] The music group U2 has a song called "Crumbs from Your Table." Where, according to lead singer Bono, it's a song that speaks in part to the church.

*"You speak of signs and wonders; I need something other.
I would believe if I was able, but I'm waiting on the crumbs from your table."*

As to that chorus, Bono, like Christ, holds out to us not only a portrait of the love that we have received, but also a portrait Jesus would have us be ... of love that goes out of its way ... that isn't so quick to say "No" ... that is ready to go the distance ... to canines like ourselves. Jesus has heard our cries for mercy. So might we be a reflection of His to the world!⁶

[SLIDE # 10] With a love that says ... ALL DOGS ARE WELCOME!

Because of Jesus' gracious invitation ... to His house, His Table, and His Bread of life! Where dogs are no longer dogs, but children ... friends ... heirs of God!

⁶ For a more in depth reflection on this song, see C. Michael Patton [<https://credohouse.org/blog/interpretation-of-u2-crumbs-from-your-table>]

Where there is bread enough for all. Where all are *truly* welcome, more than once. Where there are no outcasts here, as we, and they will have been saved by love!

Conclusion

[SLIDE # 11] On a commuter flight from Portland, Maine to Boston, Henry Dempsey, heard an unusual noise in the rear of the small aircraft. So he turned the controls over to his co-pilot and went back to check it out. When, as he reached the tail section, the plane hit an air pocket, and Dempsey was tossed against the rear door, where he quickly discovered the mysterious noise. The unsecured door had flown open, and he himself was sucked out of the jet.

The co-pilot, seeing the red indicator light, immediately radioed the nearest airport, requesting permission to make an emergency landing. He reported that the pilot had fallen out of the plane, and requested a search of the area.

There was no need. For after the plane landed, they found Henry Dempsey – holding onto the extended ladder of the plane. By some miracle he'd caught a hold of it, held on for roughly ten minutes or so, miraculously keeping his head from hitting the tarmac as the plane landed.

It took airport rescue several minutes to pry Dempsey's fingers from the ladder of the plane!

Disciples of Christ, such is the radical nature of the Christ's love – that holds onto us as sure as the woman came to hold onto Christ. Such is the nature of the Savior's love that, even now, embraces us all with outstretched arms.

"It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logical reason can be found," said John Nash at his podium in Stockholm. But it isn't really all that mysterious. And it is not at all that illogical.

[SLIDE # 12]

LOVE HAS A FACE. HIS NAME IS JESUS!

Jesus who most certainly and unequivocally loves you! Who now bids us – with His face towards others – to be, and do, the same!

Amen.

[Friday E-mail:] One of the joys of living in NH is that there are plenty of walking trails about. One can walk for miles, and never cover the same ground twice. Where, doing a "walkabout" this week, reflecting on this Sunday's Gospel reading from **Matthew 15:21-28**, I pondered: Just how far would you go to bring the Gospel someone? For Jesus, making His way to the regions of Tyre and Sidon, it was roughly 50 miles or so. Where, after the feeding of the 5,000, the interlude with the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and a bit of a row with the Pharisees, Jesus hikes west, towards Lebanon [not NH], all to meet a woman in need. It's that somewhat perplexing passage where Jesus calls the woman a "*dog*." Where, once we get past the apparent offense of that, there are some profound things at play.

First, that Jesus takes such a long hike to go to a place where Jews don't hang out. Which, it's not like the Son of God got lost here, or wander into enemy territory by accident. He intentionally goes where He goes. Feeling the opposition from His own kind, Jesus has decided to go to a place that is ripe for hearing the Gospel.

Second, this is the only recorded miracle that Jesus did in these parts. Read on, and the next thing you see Jesus is back at Galilee. Which says, aside from Jesus' ability to read maps [though He probably didn't need one], He intentionally makes the trip west just so that He can heal this woman's daughter. Again, I ask you, how far would you walk, how many miles, how much time would you give up, if there was even the hint of a chance that you would see that person in heaven with you? Is there any sacrifice we *wouldn't* make to insure such a thing?

As to the "*dog*" comment, could it be that it wasn't directed to the woman at all, but to the disciples. I mean, Jesus is having a devil of a time convincing them why He has come. Where, I suspect, the whole time they're making the jaunt into Gentile territory, they're thinking "Why exactly are we going there?" So that in meeting the woman's need, Jesus tests them with the comment.

Wherein, what transpires is something to behold. A Gentile woman of faith staring down a group of Jewish men ... and Jesus, receiving her worship, affirming her faith, once again proving that the Gospel knows no bounds. Leaving us with another question: what prejudices do we hold that prevent us from walking across the room for the sake of the Gospel? To meet people in their need with the face of love that we ourselves rejoice to behold? I'm just asking the question here – one you might consider, say, on one of your walks ... asked by one dog to another.