

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost/August 20, 2017  
Matt 15:21-28/Lord Have Mercy  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
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“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David...”

Jesus had an appointment with someone very special in today’s Gospel. He actually went north from His usual area of ministry into the Gentile areas of Tyre and Sidon; something He rarely did. The general thrust of His ministry was to the “Lost Sheep of Israel.” With very few exceptions did Jesus minister to Gentiles. Even after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples, [Luke 24:47] “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [Christ’s] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Today’s Gospel is one of those rare times He ministered to a Gentile.

The Canaanite woman thought she was searching for Jesus when in fact, Jesus was searching for her. As she came to Jesus, she cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” The Greek indicates this is a cry of desperation, terror, or some other deep emotional need. It is also a repeated cry; the woman didn’t care about her dignity. She had one goal that is Jesus to drive a demon from her daughter.

In spite of her lack of decorum, her desperation, her deep emotional state, her words are a beautiful confession of faith. She began with the supplication and praise of the Kyrie: “Have mercy on me, O Lord.” These words not only ask Jesus for help, but also praise Him as the only one who can help. Then she went on to call Jesus the “Son of David”, confessing Jesus is the Messiah. Someone had already shared Jesus with her and her faith was already strong.

However, Jesus seemed to treat this woman in a very unfriendly way. No one realized it immediately, but Jesus was treating her in a way to make her faith even stronger. At first, Jesus seemed to ignore her and continued His travels with the woman trailing crying out for help. After all, she was a woman and a Canaanite; clearly beneath His station as a Jewish rabbi. As Jesus seems to ignore this woman, the Holy Spirit deepens and strengthens her faith. After a time, her continual crying out got on the disciples' nerves and wanted her gone. They said, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." In other words, "This woman is embarrassing. Why don't you just give her what she wants so she will go away?" Jesus' rebuffs with these words: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Now you would think when the woman overheard these words, she would give up and leave. These words seem to say Jesus would not help Gentiles. Instead, this woman came right up to Jesus and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." Everything Jesus did to get rid of the woman only served to strengthen her faith.

Finally, Jesus seemed to shut this woman down completely when He spoke directly to her and said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." It seems as if Jesus shut the lid on this case and sent this woman packing.

It appears as if her case was hopeless, but Jesus left a way out for her. This rabbi, who won every debate with every scribe, Pharisee, or Sadducee He ever confronted, left a hole in His argument just for this woman. Out of her mouth came a great confession, one that is good for all people in all times and in all places. She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Whenever I read this story, I imagine Jesus' face just lit up. I imagine His heart sang for joy as He heard these precious words.

The Holy Spirit imparted faith was both wide and deep. You can tell it was Jesus' great pleasure to elevate this woman from the status of dog to the status of sister and a child of the Heavenly Father. Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." Her daughter was healed instantly.

Consider this Canaanite woman. She was willing to be called a dog just to get the crumbs that fell from the master's table. So, why is it so many are not interested in God's gifts? Why are so many absent from the church service and bible study?

The Canaanite woman in today's Gospel had a clear need only Jesus could fill. The Holy Spirit taught her Jesus was her only hope. Is it possible many of us don't really think we have a need what only Jesus can fill? Is it possible we don't understand the depth of our sin? Is it possible we don't understand our total spiritual helplessness?

Every one of us is just as helpless before God as the woman in today's Gospel. We don't love God with all of our heart, soul and mind 24/7. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves. Do we have even the mildest appreciation from what Jesus rescued us with His suffering and death on the cross? Do we have even the smallest understanding of what Jesus did to rescue us?

Jesus offers much more than crumbs in this place. He offers us His Word and even His true Body and Blood. He doesn't ask us to eat the crumbs that fall from the table. He makes a place for us at His table and offers us His very best. In today's Gospel Jesus, elevated the Gentile woman to the status of sister and a child of the Heavenly Father.

It is His great desire to elevate us as well. His desire is so great He exchanged places with us. He took our sin, guilt, and punishment onto Himself and replaced them with His righteousness. As our substitute He took the full force of God's wrath against our sin as He sacrificed Himself on the cross. Because of His great love for us, He died on the cross and was buried.

Yet the grave could not hold Him. In His death He conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil. He blazed a new trail through death into life. His resurrection promises you that those who die in the Lord will be with Him forever. Our future eternity in heaven is not the only gift Jesus gives; He also pours His gifts on us through the power of the Holy Spirit while we wait here on this earth. He already seats us at His table while we wait for that glorious day when Christ takes us home to be with Him. He does not give us the crumbs that fall from the table, but He invites us to recline with Him at table as members of His family.

As we enter into His presence, He washes us clean and clothes us in His righteousness as we confess our sins and He gives us full and complete forgiveness. He feeds us richly with the words revealed to His Apostles and Prophets as we hear the words from Holy Scripture.

What can you do in response? Join the Canaanite woman and praise Him with the words, "Lord, have mercy upon me, a poor miserable sinner." Acknowledge Him as the Son of David, the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One; who sought you and bought you with His own precious blood. Who delivers forgiveness, life and salvation. You can give thanks too for all He has done for you.