

## Matthew 15:21-28

Pentecost 12; August 20 & 21, 2023

There are many things that I find enjoyable about camping. I like being outside. I like sitting by a campfire until late at night. I like having that feeling that you are just kind of away from the busyness and craziness of life. But thing that I have begun to notice, is that camping is for all people. It really doesn't seem to matter what size of trailer or tent you might have; you all are still camping together. I'll give you an example. For our vacation this summer, we basically traveled around lake Michigan. The last night we stayed at Wells State Park in Michigan in the U.P. As we had pulled into our site, there was a family that was staying next to us with a couple of kids camping in a tent. Not long later, a woman and her dog pulled into the site next to us her small Winnebago. She was from North Carolina. She was having a little bit of a struggle backing into her site, which I can still relate to. So, I said to her, "Why don't you just go around to the road that was behind our sites and just pull it through into your site." The sites were grass and no one was in that site yet. "Really?" I said, "that's what I did." A few hours later, a young couple with their younger son pulled into the site behind us. They were from Pennsylvania. They seemed like a very nice family. Later, across from us a family would back their trailer into the site with probably at least a 40-foot trailer. Yet, even though we had different sizes of equipment, different places that we had come from, you felt like you belonged in the campground. We all paid the same price for our sites. After all, we were all camping. We were all enjoying the same thing. We all belonged together.

As I was thinking about that, I think God wants us to feel the same way about people in His Church. He came to die for all people. He gives us the same faith in Jesus. He gives us the same Word of God found in the Bible. He calls us to follow the same commands to follow out of thankfulness for the faith he has given us. He gives the same promises to all who believe. As Paul writes to the Galatians: **"<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** (Gal. 3:26-28) In Christ, we belong to him.

Today, Jesus is going to teach his disciples a lesson on belonging in Christ's Kingdom in a way that must have felt a little shocking to them. He begins: **"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.'**" Jesus had been teaching in the area of Galilee. Things were starting to heat up for Jesus and the disciples. The opposition Jesus was getting from the scribes and the Pharisees was getting more intense. So, Jesus decided that it would be good time to leave there.

As he withdraws from the area of Galilee, Matthew says that a **"Canaanite woman"** approached them. To call her a **"Canaanite"** brings with it a lot of baggage. The Canaanites were an ancient enemy of the Israelites, the people that the Israelites were to have driven out of the Promised Land 1400 years earlier. The Canaanites were a pagan people, worshiping false gods of their own making. So that's what Matthew is accenting when he calls her a **"Canaanite"** woman. Any *"good"* Jew would not be caught hanging around a **"Canaanite."**

What does Jesus do? **"Jesus did not answer a word."** It seems out of character for Jesus, doesn't it? Here is a woman coming to him for help, and he doesn't even acknowledge her. So, what's going on here? For thousands of years, God had made it clear that the Savior of the World was going to come through his chosen people – the Jewish people. However, God had never said that ONLY the Jews would be saved by this Savior. Did you catch it in the First Lesson for today. Isaiah writes: **"And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who... hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer..... a house of prayer for all nations."**

Yet, God's people thought that they were better than others. In other words, God's "chosen people" had gotten good at teaching people that if you didn't believe or act in a certain way, you didn't belong to the kingdom of God. The Pharisees had gotten really good at doing that. From an outward standpoint, the Pharisees were good, upright and outstanding people. But inside, they were far away from God. Even the disciples were getting uncomfortable with this Canaanite who kept crying out to Jesus. **"So, his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'" Yet, she would not give up.**

It was her own personal nightmare. Something terrible had happened to her little girl. There was something inside her, something tormenting her. She was under the power of the Devil. She couldn't do anything about it. I have no doubt that she had tried. But it didn't stop.

Then she heard the stories about a man in the country of Israel who could cast out demons with a word. They said that he's the Son of David, the great King who was to come and save the people of Israel. They said that he was the Messiah. The thought went through her head: *What if? What if? What if he could help my little girl?* What does she do? **"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! Lord, help me!"** What does Jesus do after he had been silent and now speaks? **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."** He sounded as if she were worth nothing to him – a pet dog not fit for the children's food.

Then this woman says something so amazing, so profound, so trusting. *"Well, even if I'm a pet dog, I have a place in the house. And in the house of my God, I am content even for the crumbs that fall from the table, if that's what you have given me, Lord. I know that this is your plan. I trust in your plan. But now be merciful to me and hear my prayer."* I wonder what the faces of the disciple looked when they heard these words for this woman? Then Jesus turns to her and says: **"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."**

In his ministry, Jesus had called the Pharisees blind; the disciples he called people of little faith and spiritually dull. But this Gentile woman, to her he says **"You have great faith."** There are only 2 people that Jesus calls having **great faith**. One is here. The other is a Roman Centurion. Both are Gentiles. Jesus taught a great lesson that day to his disciples. He showed them that the Church is meant for all people. Jesus had taken this woman and invited her to the table of faith. She, in turn, trusted the crumbs from her master were enough for her, and instead she found a Savior who would give her more than she could have hoped for. **"And her daughter was healed at that moment."**

That's the lesson Jesus teaches to us as well. He has come for all people; even those who may not always be the most upstanding people and have their act together. He comes to people who have problems in their life. He comes to those who have gotten off track and may even regret the bad choices they have made. He comes to sinners lost in the world. He comes and says that no matter who you are, you belong to me. May God grant it. Amen.