

Matthew 15:21-28

Pentecost 13

August 30, 2020

Some people are motivated by a desperate situation. A famous paratrooper was speaking to a group of young recruits. When he had finished his prepared talk and called for questions, one young man raised his hand and said, "What made you decide to make your first jump"? The paratrooper's answer was quick and to the point. *"An airplane at 20,000 feet with three dead engines."*

The woman was trapped and desperate. There was no way out. No one to turn to. She had tried everything. Yet, nothing had been able to drive the demons from her daughter. As a parent she felt helpless with her child in trouble. Matthew doesn't give us the details of her demon possession. It is clear that she is at the end of her rope. Jesus is all she has left. On this day, Jesus was going to teach her, his disciples and the Pharisees a priceless lesson that all they, and us, need is Jesus.

You might remember the Gospel Lessons from the last several Sundays. Jesus had fed the 5,000. He had walked on water. He had stilled the storm. Yet, even though he is popular with the people, the Jewish leaders hated him all the more. In the verses just before our text, Jesus endured another attack of the Jewish religious elite. They thought that in order to be a part of the church, they were to act in a certain way, dress in a certain way, and walk in a certain way. They taught that the only way that you could be clean before God was by the things that you did. Jesus told them that out of sinful hearts come sinful actions. **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."** So, Jesus was going to teach them that God isn't impressed by the things you do, but he is impressed by what Jesus was doing for them. He wanted everyone to learn that day that God's church is meant for all.

Matthew tells us: **"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.'"** In order to understand the lesson that Jesus was going to teach, it is helpful to know some history of the Canaanite and Israelite people. God had promised to give the descendants of Abraham a land flowing with milk and honey. They were God's Chosen people through whom the Savior was to come. When the time came to enter that land, the Canaanites were those people who were supposed to have been purged from the land under Joshua. But that didn't happen.

So, where does Jesus go? He goes straight into Canaanite country where the cities of Tyre and Sidon were. It was as if Jesus was crossing the tracks and going over to the other side. These two groups of people, the Israelites and Canaanites hated each. They didn't speak to each other. The Israelites called the Canaanites *"dogs"* – filthy, garbage-picking scavengers. Any respectable Israelite wouldn't even talk to a Canaanite if one came up to them on the street.

Then this woman comes up to Jesus and says: **"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."** What does Jesus do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He acted in way that the Pharisees and the Disciples thought he should be acting. Why would he talk to her? In their culture, 1. women don't approach men, much less rabbis. She cries out to Him. 2. Women are not to talk to a man in public. But Jesus is her last hope. She knows who she is; she knows who Jesus is. 3. She's a Canaanite; He's an Israelite. She addresses Him with a Jewish title, **"Lord, son of David."** She knew who Jesus was. She knew what he could do. But it doesn't stop her from asking: **"Lord, have mercy on me."** I think it's fascinating how she speaks. She says: **"on ME."** Her heart is breaking seeing her daughter go through so much pain and suffering. She needed Jesus.

What does Jesus do? He acts in a way that the disciples and the Pharisees had expected. She was a Canaanite. Jews don't associate with Canaanites. In fact, the disciples thought that maybe they could help Jesus out even. **"So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'"** What would you have expected Jesus to do there? I think all of us would have expected Jesus to heal that woman's daughter. Jesus healed the sick. He had just fed 5,000. He had walked on water. Calmed the storm. Jesus reached down to Peter while he was

sinking on the Galilean Sea. Peter didn't have to wait until he was going under for the last time before Jesus pulled him into the boat. But Jesus says nothing. But that doesn't stop her.

Jesus finally speaks. But He doesn't really speak to her directly. He just speaks, reminding her of who she is, and who she isn't. **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."** Ouch! It doesn't get much harsher than that, does it? *Sorry, I'm not here for you. I'm here for the Israelites, not Canaanites like you. Sorry, you'll have to go somewhere else.*

It gets worse. This time Jesus speaks to her directly, **"It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."** Double ouch! His silence was bad enough. His harsh statement about His being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel was even worse. But this is distressing. Jesus appears cruel, heartless, uncaring, unsympathetic. He calls her **"a dog."** Why would Jesus do this? Because he was going to teach them a lesson on mercy that they would never forget.

Suddenly, Jesus changes course. Jesus said to her, **"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.** I wonder what was going through the disciples minds when Jesus says: **"Woman, you have great faith."** Jesus doesn't call her a *"dog"* anymore. Even if she was a dog, she would still have a place in the house. She knew if she had a place in the house, she would be okay with just the crumbs that came from her Savior. *I trust you plan. Now be merciful to me.* Jesus wanted all those who were with him that day to know that Jesus came for all people. Not just for the elite. Not for those who look good on the outside – all people. Can you imagine the loving, care look Jesus gave to this woman?

Did you know that there are only 2 people that Jesus says that they have **"great faith."** This Canaanite woman here and a Roman Centurion soldier. You see, she didn't act like the Pharisees. She didn't look like the disciples. Jesus then gives her so much more than she had asked for. Her daughter was healed. Her sin was forgiven. The lesson that Jesus was teaching that day was that his Church was meant for all. No matter who you are and what you have done, Jesus gives great faith. Great faith that isn't from anything you have done. It is great faith because it came from a great God. May God help us to remember the lesson that Jesus taught. You belong to him and you have a place in His Church through Jesus. Amen.