

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 15:21-28.

HYMNS: 219, 222, 319, 420, 292, 426.

INTROIT: Psalm 67.

P May God be gracious to us and bless us!

C **May He make His face shine on us**

P that Your way may be known on the earth,

C **and Your salvation among all nations!**

P Let the peoples praise You, O God!

C **Let all the peoples praise You!**

P Let the nations be glad and shout for joy! For You will judge the peoples justly,

C **and You will lead the nations on the earth.**

P O God! Let all the peoples praise You!

C **Let the peoples praise You,**

P The earth has produced its yield.

C **God, our God, will bless us.**

All: **God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him.**

COLLECT: Almighty and everlasting Father, You give Your children many blessings even though we are undeserving. In every trial and temptation grant us steadfast confidence in Your loving kindness and mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings

Old Testament: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8.

Epistle: Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15, 28-32.

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all Amen.

The text for our sermon for this Sunday is written in the book of Matt 15:21-28 which was our gospel reading before

21 Then Jesus went out from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** A Canaanite woman of that territory came out and began to shout: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." **23** However, He did not answer her a word. Then His disciples came to Him and urged Him, "Send her away! For she keeps shouting after us." **24** He answered, "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the family of Israel." **25** Then she came, bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, help me!" **26** He answered, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the pet dogs." **27** She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the pet dogs eat some of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters." **28** Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, your faith is great! Let it be done for you as you wish!" From that hour her daughter was made well.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. **Amen.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

The account of the Canaanite Woman that we heard in today's Gospel is one of the more interesting accounts of Jesus in the Bible. In a few short verses there are all sorts of twists and turns. At first, Jesus seems to act very much out of character. He ignores this woman who needs His help. Then He insults her. Nevertheless, she keeps on coming back. Suddenly, there is this twist and we see the method to Christ's attitude and it all makes sense in a wonderfully unexpected way.

First, a little context: A couple of weeks ago' Gospel told how Jesus and the disciples returned to the western shores of the Sea of Galilee after Jesus had fed the five thousand. After they landed, Jesus continued His healing ministry. Once again, the healing ministry raised all kinds of attention. and, whenever Jesus got a lot of attention, the Jerusalem chapter of the scribes and Pharisees soon showed up to give Jesus a hard time. Then last week we heard of Jesus rescuing Peter from drowning after spending the night praying to His father in the mountains. Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus left this area and headed north over the border of Galilee into the Gentile countryside near the Mediterranean Sea towns of Tyre and Sidon. I sometimes wonder if Jesus didn't take the disciples into Gentile territory just so that He could get them away from all the drama of dealing with the scribes and Pharisees and to show them that God is interested in all people and not just the Jews.

When you're in a Gentile area, you expect to meet Gentiles. Sure enough, a Canaanite woman approached Jesus for help. Now, although she's a Canaanite, her cry for mercy is an incredible expression of faith. **“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”** Let's take a closer look at this statement.

She began with the words that we know as the Kyrie, **“Lord, have mercy.”** These words are a cry to the Lord for help and strength. In ancient times, the crowds would shout *“Lord, have mercy”* as the King entered their town. The church has taken over this prayer to greet its King Jesus Christ in the church service. As the people so long ago expected help from their King, so we Christians expect help from our Saviour and King. These words show that this woman recognized Jesus as royalty who had the power and authority to help her in her time of need.

Then she referred to Jesus as the **“Son of David.”** With these words, she confessed her faith that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one of God. With these words, she demonstrated that she has a better handle on who Jesus is than most of the people who encountered Jesus down south in Galilee. This Canaanite woman has given us a most beautiful way to begin any prayer in time of need.

After the woman confessed her faith, she stated her problem. **“My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”** Notice that she simply stated her concern to Jesus. She didn't tell Jesus what to do about it. Instead, she trusted Jesus to come up with the solution that was the best for her daughter and for her.

Right here, we can learn a lot from this woman. When we ask God for help, how often do we try to tell God exactly how He should help us? Instead of relying on the infinite knowledge and perfect wisdom of God, we often tell God exactly how and when He has to help us. This woman simply expressed what was on her mind and simply relied on Jesus for the best answer to her prayer.

So, how did Jesus respond to this marvellous prayer? He did nothing! He ignored her. This is one of those times that puzzles the reader from our western culture. Just a few paragraphs earlier, we read about the “Feeding of the Five Thousand, and the saving of Peter.” In those accounts, Jesus had compassion. That's the Jesus we remember and look for ... the Jesus who has compassion. Who's this Jesus who ignores this woman in her need ... especially when she prays such a beautiful prayer?

Actually, for the moment, Jesus was acting as the culture in His day expected Him to act. This woman was after all a Gentile and she was ... well ... a woman. In the culture of that day and that place, these were two excellent reasons for Jesus to ignore this woman.

The only thing is that this woman wouldn't give up. Although Matthew only records the words of the woman's prayer once, He makes it clear that she repeated these words continuously. The constant repetition started to get on the disciples' nerves. They too, began to pray for the woman, although their prayers were for entirely selfish reasons. "Give the woman what she wants so that she will go away and stop bothering us!"

Jesus' rebuffed the disciples' request with these words: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This reply shocks our 21st century ears, but at the time Matthew recorded this account, this reply would seem perfectly normal. Keep in mind all the people who made the Apostle Paul's life miserable by insisting that a person had to become Jewish and circumcised before they could become a Christian. One of the many themes in Matthew's account is the theme that the Gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles alike. You don't have to be a Jew before you can become a Christian. No doubt the woman overheard Jesus as He rebuffed the disciples. However, instead of giving up, she dropped to her knees before Jesus and continued to pray to Him. In fact, she probably literally got in his way.

Finally, Jesus spoke directly to the woman, "**It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" Hang on a minute! Did Jesus really say that? Did Jesus just call this woman a dog? Yes He did, and it was just as insulting back then as it is today. Some preachers have watered down scripture to try to take some of the sting out of what Jesus said. They'll say that Jesus meant a cute, little dog ... the family pet if you will. BUT it just doesn't work. It can't be done. Jesus said that because the woman was a gentile, she was a dog.

Our culture today is so quick to take offense. We hear, "God didn't really say that, I don't like it," "It bothers me," "I disagree with that," "You are just a hater, a Xenophobic: [*dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries.*] and so on. How would a woman in today's western culture respond if Jesus called her a dog? It sounds like a good excuse for a lawsuit to me.

Nevertheless, how does the woman respond in today's Gospel? She said, "**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.**" Yes Lord! If Jesus says that I am a dog, then I am a dog. Whatever Jesus says, no matter how offensive or ridiculous it is, it's the truth and she had the Faith to understand and not take offence. If Jesus says, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,**" then that is the truth. [John 14:6.] If Jesus says, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance,**" [Luke 5:31-32.] then that is the truth!

You see, when Jesus describes us using terms that are offensive to our ears, He is saying that we are qualified to receive His salvation. The Apostle Paul demonstrates His understanding of this when he wrote to Timothy: "**The saying is trustworthy, and it deserves full acceptance: that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the chief.**" [1Timothy 1:15.] . Here the Apostle Paul is doing the same thing that the woman did. If Jesus says I am a dog, then I am a dog. If Jesus says I am a sinner, then I am a sinner. Christ died for those who would normally be an offense to God. The comfort in knowing that we are a sinful dogs is knowing that Christ died for us!

Jesus answered the woman, "**O woman, your faith is great! Let it be done for you as you wish!**" **From that hour her daughter was made well.** " If this were to take place in modern times, I could just see Jesus doing a fist pump and saying, "Yes!" This is the part that I love. Here we see that this whole exercise

has been to contrast the faith of this woman, who admitted she was a sinful dog, with the unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees, who thought they were so righteous.

Here, in this Gospel account, we see that it is those who admit that they are offensive before the Lord ... those who confess that they are poor miserable sinners ... those who confess that they deserve temporal and eternal punishment ... those who confess that they love themselves more than God ... those who confess that they exploit their neighbours whom they should love ... It is these who receive the healing forgiveness that the Lord earned for them with His holy life and His innocent suffering and death on the cross. These are the ones who know that the resurrection of our Lord carries the promise that they too shall rise from the dead and live a new life with Him forever.

Within the greater context of Matthew, the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel is such a contrast with the scribes and Pharisees who gave Jesus so much grief. What a condemnation for the educated elite of Jerusalem that they rejected the gift of faith that the Holy Spirit gave to this Gentile woman. What a blessing that this gift of faith is to all who believe. What a strange and marvellous God we have that even though we confess that we are offensive, sinful dogs before Him, He will call us His children and seat us at the table in His presence. **Amen.**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

C Amen.

3rd Hymn: 319,

Prayer of the Church 11th Sunday after Pentecost

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P For the Church, that she may steadfastly proclaim the irrevocable gifts and calling of God, that the disobedient may receive mercy, and that those who hear may become branches grafted onto the true vine, Jesus Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our congregations, that we may bring offerings and sacrifices of praise that are acceptable to God; that we would be a house of prayer for all people; and that through us God would gather in the lost and outcast, the widowed and orphaned, and all who are in need, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the government and those who protect us, that they may keep justice and do righteousness; that they may carry out their duties in accord with God's will; and that our land would be blessed with honest industry, truthful education and an honourable way of life, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the sick and afflicted [*especially* _____], for those beset with grief and sorrow, for those in pain or trouble, that the Lord may answer those who beg Him according to His will and have mercy on all, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who will receive Christ's body and blood here from this altar, that these crumbs may strengthen us in faith and love and bring us to unity with God and neighbour, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who have died trusting in the Saviour and sharing in His endless life, let us give today our thanks and praise, asking that we might receive our portion with the saints in light, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 420