

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 3, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV)

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22) 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." 23) Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

24) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25) The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26) He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." 27) "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." 28) Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Dear Friends in Christ:

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Dogs are some of the most faithful creatures you can find. You can leave them alone for 5 minutes or for a whole day and when you return they greet you as if they haven't seen you in years! You can accidentally step on their feet and they'll try to find a way to apologize to you! You give them a little pat on the head and they act as if you've given them hours of attention. Even though dogs have some very endearing traits – it's not really considered a compliment if you call someone a dog – but that's essentially what Jesus called the woman in our text who was crying out for his help. How would you feel if someone treated you that way? I'd probably turn away with a rather resentful feeling – but not this woman – in a good sense she acted just like a dog – she persisted in seeking attention the attention the one she called Lord and master. Ultimately, like a faithful master the Lord Jesus gave her the attention she was seeking and more. We see in this text that

Theme: Jesus feeds the dogs

1. Even though he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel
2. He gives them more than just crumbs

Let's take a closer look at Jesus and his actions in this text. **Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22) A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."**

Jesus had recently been in the area of Capernaum where recent events had caused him to feel the need for some quiet time alone with his disciples. While he was there news had come to him that his cousin and forerunner John the Baptist had been beheaded. The people responded to his miracles by trying to make their king. The Pharisees began to grow more and more antagonistic toward Jesus. Mark in his account of this event tells us that Jesus entered a house and did not want anyone to know it. (Mark 7:24)

The region of Tyre and Sidon would have been north of the area of Galilee where Capernaum was located. It was there that a Canaanite woman sought Jesus out. If you recall the Canaanites were the original inhabitants of this area back at the time when the Israelites took over their land at God's direction after Moses lead them to the land of promise. They were regarded as Gentiles and treated with contempt by many of the Jews of Jesus day.

This particular woman must have heard about the promises God had made to his people – to raise up a Messiah from the house of David. She certainly had heard of Jesus and his miracles and that's what prompted her to cry out to Jesus: "**Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.**" Whatever she understood of Israel's hopes, whatever she knew of the promised Savior, one thing is clear: she believed that Jesus was that Savior and that he would help her. Her cry for help was a wonderful confession of her faith.

How did Jesus respond? We might say he treated her like a dog – he seemed to ignore her. **Jesus did not answer a word.** It certainly didn't look like he would help. He silently kept on walking. How did the woman respond? She acted like a dog – sort of. She followed crying out from behind the group. Finally, her cries bothered Jesus' disciples. They urged Jesus to dismiss her. **His disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."**

The disciples came and asked Him to dismiss her because she was making such a racket. It may seem as if they were asking Him to heartlessly send her away, but that was probably not the case. They clearly could have meant that He should send her away *with her request granted*. Jesus' answer shows that likelihood. His answer, however, is as unsettling as His previous silence: "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" We want to say, "Wait a minute! Isn't this the same Jesus who told a story that makes a hero out of a Samaritan, who held up a Roman centurion's faith as greater than any Israelite's, who asked for water from a Samaritan woman, etc.?"

Jesus response to his disciples indicated that his mission was to work among the Israelites. He had been sent to seek and to find the lost sheep of Israel – they in turn would proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. It is important for us to understand Jesus' response clearly, because we are not numbered among the lost sheep of Israel either. Jesus here is simply describing his personal ministry as being primarily a ministry to the Jews. Of course as Jesus tell us (John 3:16) "**God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**" And so, we can join the Canaanite woman in looking to Jesus as our Savior and helper.

In spite of Jesus' silence and in spite of his comments to the disciples the woman did not go away. **The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.** Her need was too great and her faith too strong for her to give up now. She persisted in her prayers – throwing herself at Jesus' feet. Lord help me she pleaded just as we sing, *Lord have mercy on us*. In addressing Jesus as the Son of David and in pleading for his mercy she is seeking grace and forgiveness. She seeks no recognition, offers no credentials, and suggests no reason why Jesus should pay the least attention to her. She asks for mercy.

She has shown the signs of a remarkable faith. She came seeking Jesus' grace just as I prayer that we have come today. It is through the Word and Sacraments that we experience God's mercy and the strengthening of the Spirit we so desperately need. There we experience God's grace to us without regard to our heritage, lineage, or race -- without regard to what we have done or what we have failed to do. There we find relief from our fears of God's judgment against us. There we find mercy!

How did Jesus respond to her cry? **He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."** It is helpful here for us to understand that the word Jesus used when he talked about tossing the children's bread to the dogs was not the same derogatory word that many of the Jews would have used to describe this woman. The word might be translated pet dogs. A close look at Jesus answer shows us that Jesus is listing some priorities. He's not saying you should not feed the pets – just that you wouldn't take the food which the children needed and give it to the dogs instead. In the same way, Jesus suggests that it would not be proper to give blessings that belonged to Israel to those who are not Israelites. Children sit at the table, dogs don't.

Amazingly, it seems that the Canaanite women may have understood Jesus' answer better than most of us. She teaches us – who would also be classified as dogs rather than children – to be bold in our requests and to be strong in our faith. She doesn't whine. She doesn't complain about being treated unfairly or unkindly. She accepts his statement but shows her confidence that she will not be neglected. **"Yes it is Lord," she said, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."**

The woman did not wish to deprive “the children – the lost sheep of Israel” of anything. She's confident that even the crumbs would be sufficient for her. She's sure the Lord can answer her prayer without taking any blessing from the Jews. And she was right – the Lord. Jesus himself reminds us -- **your Father in heaven. (He) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.** There is indeed enough of the Father's blessings for all. The Psalmist reminds us: (Psalms 145:8-9) **The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. 9) The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.**

Jesus shows that goodness and compassion as he addresses the woman, whom one writer called the Canaanite Canine in the final verse of our text: **Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.** Jesus – the one the woman looked to as her master – did not disappoint her. He calmly said: **"Your request is granted."** There was no big show – no grand procession to her house. But, her daughter was healed from that very moment. The simplicity of the words betray the beauty of the miracle. Deliverance from the devil is no small matter. Her daughter had been physically held captive by the devil – now she had been set free.

Each of us would be in spiritual captivity to the devil if Christ had not come to destroy the work of the Devil and to set us free. Jesus' miracle shows his complete power over the Devil – it reveals him as the Savior sent by God – the Savior of the world.

The Canaanite woman had placed her faith in him and Jesus calls attention to her faith – calling it great. What made her faith great? It was a great faith because it was a faith that believed in Jesus as the Lord, the promised Son of David. She trusted in the Lord's mercy. She admitted her unworthiness. She accepted his word. She was confident that he would not refuse her even though she was a Gentile. She believed that Jesus feeds the dogs and she was willing to accept whatever attention he would give to her.

There are a couple of applications for our lives suggested by this text. One is that we see ourselves as dogs – if you will – individuals who do not deserve food from the Father's table. By looking at ourselves in that way we won't be so likely to look down on others and think of them as being unworthy to be a part of the Lord's church. The Canaanite woman serves as a preview of the great harvest of souls that the Lord will gather from all nations. She's one of us – a gentile who became a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. May we gladly share the wonderful grace of our Lord with everyone being careful not to treat others as outsiders.

Jesus disciples needed the constant reminder that Jesus had other sheep – not just the lost sheep of Israel. That's a reminder that we need to hear once in a while too. It becomes too easy for us to look at those outside the church as the enemy. It's easy for us to develop a we/they attitude. That's when we need to be reminded once again that Jesus came not just for a selected group of people, not just for a particular nation but to give his life for all. May such a knowledge fill us with an attitude that is willing to welcome sinners one and all into the Lord's family as we proclaim his praises to them.

May we rejoice that Jesus gladly feeds us with his life-giving grace through the Gospel in word and sacrament – he gives us more than crumbs – he feeds us even though we were not among the lost sheep of Israel. Amen.