

**Matthew 15:21-28**

Last Sunday the Gospel reading in Matthew 14 told us about Jesus' disciples in a boat. Today in Matthew 15 we hear about a Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by demons. This woman was a half-breed—a descendant of the heathen Canaanites and also of the Jews who conquered the land under Joshua. Now in these two chapters in Matthew, Jesus utters the word "faith" twice. Once in regard to His disciples in the boat, and the other time in reference to this woman. One might assume that He would speak highly of the faith of the Twelve and not so highly of the woman's faith. Not so. Rather, He rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith, and to the woman He says: Your faith is great! How could a woman who likely had never seen Jesus before, had ancestors who were pagans, and lived in a thoroughly non-Christian community have a much stronger faith than the disciples of the Lord, who were with Him daily, came from God-fearing ancestors, and lived in the land of God's people?

Through the sermon it is not my intention, so much, to answer this question as it is to use it as a touch-point between them and us today. For this I need to say from the very beginning: In looking at this story of the Canaanite woman, some of us who think we are strong in the faith may find just the opposite to be true, and some of us who think our faith is weak may find that it is actually quite strong. In both cases the purpose of this message is to drive us to the Word of Christ—the source of our Christian faith.

Now this story is not just about the Canaanite woman—the disciples show up here too.

And in typical fashion, they act as Jesus' bodyguards, trying to keep those of "questionable character" away from Him—namely, this woman. You see, when Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan, God's orders were clear: Kill them all! Not a man, woman, or child was to remain alive. God's people were to eradicate every Canaanite pagan. And pagans they were. They despised the true God. Their lifestyles were horribly immoral. As part of their idolatrous worship practices, they would at times slaughter their own children. God would not have His people infected by these pagans. They were all to be wiped out. But Israel did not obey. They allowed some of the Canaanites to live. Some Jews even intermarried with them.

That's how this woman came to be. She should not have been. Her ancestors should all have been killed. But because of Israel's disobedience—here she is, a half-breed Canaanite, considered by the Jews to be the lowest of the low. And she comes to Jesus for help.

She would have heard of Him. Even in her far-off community of Tyre and Sidon, the works of Christ were spoken of. She came to Him asking for help. Her daughter was possessed by a demon. No sickness, no mental illness—this was the worst of the worst—bodily possession by one of Satan's evil angels.

What does Jesus do? He ignores her. Complete silence from His lips. When God is silent toward you, what is your response? When your prayers appear to go unanswered, do you quit on Him and give up? We can learn from this woman.

Jesus' disciples were of no help. "Send her away, Lord," they kept saying. "Get rid of her!" Why? Was He too busy for her? Was He too tired to help? No, they did not believe

she deserved His help. She was a Canaanite, after all. She should never have been born. Who did she think she was coming to Jesus for help?!

Jesus seems to agree. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Finally He speaks to her, but what He says is not very encouraging. He seems to be closing the door for help on this woman. But she is not deterred. She bows down before Him, “Lord, help me,” is her only cry. Does He help? No, rather He now insults her, calling her a dog. “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

At what point would you have walked away? When He first ignored you? When His disciples got between the two of you and told you to “get lost!” When Jesus flat out said, “I’m not here for you”? Or, perhaps when He calls you, to your face, a little dog? Or maybe, instead of walking away from Him, you and I might stay and argue. “Who do you think you are speaking to me like that! I deserve better treatment than this!”

Not this woman. She agrees with Him. “Yes Lord, I am a dog, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their Master’s table.” No argument here. Faith does not argue with God. Faith agrees with Him...no matter what. Faith believes that God’s word to us is true, no matter what it says.

This woman had every reason to believe that she was not going to receive help from Jesus—not today, not tomorrow, not ever. And yet she persisted. The more He pushed her away, the closer she drew to Him. Why? Because she had faith. Faith believes the word of the Gospel, no matter what we may experience in our lives. Am I suffering? This does not mean that God has forsaken me, for His Gospel tells me that He will never reject me. Do I feel burdened with the weight of my sins? Does my conscience bother me? This does not mean that I am not forgiven, for the Gospel declares to me that Christ died for all sinners; that all sins are forgiven. Faith believes the Gospel no matter what.

This woman believed that Jesus was the Messiah—the One who had been sent to defeat sin and Satan, the Merciful Redeemer. Her daughter was possessed by Satan. Jesus had come to defeat Satan. Therefore, He would help her daughter. This she believed, and nothing was going to keep her from believing that. Even what her eyes and ears saw and heard was not going to convince her otherwise. It didn’t matter that Jesus did not seem the least bit interested in her. She knew He was. It didn’t matter that Jesus told her He wouldn’t help. She knew He would. There was no one else she would turn to, for no one else could help. Only Jesus was the Savior from sin, death, and the devil. And so, even when He scorns her with an insult, she still draws near to Him.

Friend, Jesus said this woman had great faith. But it wasn’t because she kept persisting. Rather, she persisted because of her faith. What makes a faith great? Only one thing—its object. What it clings to and trusts in. This woman put the disciples to shame. Their faith was weak. They did not believe this woman deserved help. As if they did? Yes! That’s what they thought. “Since we’re God’s chosen people, and followers of Jesus, we deserve all the good blessings He gives us.” That’s not faith in the Gospel, that’s faith in themselves, which is no faith at all.

We think like that too: God owes me, after all, I come to church every Sunday—and even if I don’t, when I do come it’s quite a sacrifice on my part, so He owes me for making the

effort. Or try this one: Of course I'm a Christian! My great-grandfather helped build this church, after all. Not only that, but look at all the work I do around here, unlike some people I know. Sounds like those disciples, telling Jesus who did, and who did not deserve His help.

Some of us, like the disciples, are pedigree Lutherans. It runs in the family—great things, outstanding ancestors, wonderful achievements...churches built, missionaries sent out, years of Sunday School classes taught. That's great. But if we connect our faith to these things then we're like the disciples here. Faith in our achievements is not faith. Faith tied to our family name is no faith. Thank God for these things, but like this woman, recognize who you are—a little dog deserving of nothing from Jesus. Put your faith in His mercy and grace. That's what she did. The word of the Gospel—of God's compassion toward sinners, is the only thing she trusted. But that was enough—that was the crumb that fell from the Master's table—that's faith, and nothing else is.

In a few minutes you're going to come up to the Master's Table—the Table of His grace and forgiveness. Come like this woman. Say: I deserve nothing good from you, O Lord, for I am a dog, a worthless sinner. But I come because I trust Your promise. Your Word says that Christ died for sinners—that He took all the punishment I deserved and paid that price in full. You must give me, Lord, Your body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins. For this You have promised. I have sinned greatly, Lord...yesterday, and all my yesterdays, and today. But You have said that You take my sins, and in their place give me Your innocence. I do not come with a strong faith, O Lord. My faith is weak. For too often I feel that You owe me good things because of who I am and what I've done. Help me, Lord, to trust only in Your Word of Forgiveness to sinners, and through that Word, strengthen my faith in You.

Did Jesus help that woman? Absolutely! How could He not help her? That's why He came there. And that's why He comes here—to His font, to His Table, through His Word—to give you what you need: the forgiveness of your sins, life, and salvation. And you are forgiven. For the crumbs that come from the Master's Table give you the Master's grace and mercy in all its fullness. Amen.