

Matthew 15:21-28

Do you have faith? A lot of people say they do. They think that faith is nothing more than believing in God. But “*even the demons believe and tremble,*” says the Epistle of James. It is not the purpose of this sermon to cause us to doubt our faith. Rather, in our Gospel reading for today, we meet a woman who shows us what it means to have faith. “*O woman,*” Jesus says to her, “*Great is your faith!*” We who are people of faith will see ourselves in this woman. Since Jesus holds her up as an example for us, we will want to learn from her as she approaches Jesus in our text.

“*Have mercy on me, O Lord,*” she cries, “*Son of David.*” This woman calls Jesus Lord. But even more, she goes on to call Him “*Son of David.*” Faith recognizes Jesus and calls Him who He is. This woman may have had a number of lords and masters in her life, and she may have had respect for them and received blessings and benefits from them. But Jesus is Lord to her in a different way. He is Lord because He is the Son of David.

Jesus is both David’s Son and David’s Lord. He is born in time of a woman, and He is Lord over time, existing before time began. Very few called Jesus the Son of David. This woman joins their ranks recognizing that Jesus is in truth the Christ, the promised Savior, God in the flesh, coming from the line of King David.

Like this woman, you recognize Jesus for who He is. This is not your doing. It is the work of God within you. “*No one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*” But recognizing Jesus is not enough. When He was casting out demons, sometimes they would cry out and announce who He was. In Mark chapter 5, a demon cries, “*What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*” The demons believed that Jesus was the Lord, that He was Lord and Master over them. They knew He was born of woman and that He was God in the flesh. But the demons did not have faith.

The woman in our story does not just recognize who Jesus is; she recognizes who she is. She comes to Him because her daughter is in need of help. But she does not say, “*Have mercy on my daughter, Lord.*” She says, “*Have mercy on me.*” She identifies herself with the one who is cruelly demon-possessed. Jesus’ mercy is not just for her daughter; it is for her.

Anyone can ask God to be merciful to another person. Faith cries, “*Have mercy on me!*” We can sit here in church and think of this person and that person who needs to be here to confess their sin and receive forgiveness. We can pray for God’s mercy on those in other countries who are oppressed by the devil, and on those in St. Louis who are dealing with anger and violence. But to cry, “*Have mercy on me,*” is to say, “*I am a sinner in need of mercy...I am one who is oppressed by the devil...there is anger and there is violence within my own heart.*” This woman was not above the need for mercy. Were God not merciful to her, she dare never approach Jesus to help her daughter.

Yet this woman not only joins herself to her daughter with the words, “*Have mercy on me,*” she joins herself to Jesus. The only way to approach the Righteous God is through His mercy. If we try to approach God by our works done for Him, by our offerings to Him, by our goodness, our faithfulness, by anything about us at all, God will reject us. It is only God who approaches us in mercy. He is holy; we are poor sinners. He is God; we are not.

This woman recognized this about herself. She does not come to Jesus with reasons why He should help her. She brings no resume, no references. She comes only with the cry, *“Have mercy on me!”* With these words she joins herself to Jesus. She clings to Him. Nothing can separate her from Him. Not His silence. Not His disciples who beg to be rid of her. Not His referring to her as a dog. She has faith. She sees Jesus for who He is, and she accepts the truth that she is a worthless sinner. But she inserts one word between Jesus and herself...the word “mercy.” Faith sees a God who is merciful to poor, worthless sinners, and to no one else.

This is why she does not take offense when Jesus is silent at first, and then when He calls her a dog. What about us? Do we become offended too easily? I know I do. I hate to think of how I might have reacted had I been in the shoes of this Canaanite woman. I might have walked away from Jesus in anger, offended by how He spoke, or didn’t speak to me.

When the pastor or members of a congregation become easily offended, it is a sure sign that they think too highly of themselves. “How dare she say that to me!” “How dare he speak to me in that tone!” Sometimes the reaction is one of anger. Sometimes it involves staying away from worship and withholding the offering to the Lord. Sometimes it involves leaving the church for good.

Not this woman. She shows us what faith is. She buries any offense or anger against Jesus and says, *“Yes Lord...”* She accepts His treatment of her. She does not walk away or react with emotion. She clings to Jesus because she has faith.

Faith does not mind at all being called a dog. In fact, faith loves being called a dog. Dogs eat things that no human would ever eat. I don’t want to gross you out this morning, but surely you are quite aware of the many despicable things lying out in the grass that dogs eagerly devour.

“Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table,” said this woman. Dear fellow dogs, welcome to your Master’s table. Most people in the world turn up their nose at the crumbs that are offered here. Most wouldn’t be caught dead sitting in a Bible Class or in a church pew. It nauseates them to even think of eating what we dogs eat. But you are a dog who belongs to your Master. What we see as crumbs are the morsels of eternal life. The crumbs that reach your ears through the preaching and teaching that goes on here, feed you with all you need. The crumbs here at the Communion Table fall into your mouth, and they are the very body and blood of your Lord.

As you come here to church, and come forward to the altar like little dogs to their master’s table, you do not come with anger or offense; you come in faith. Dogs are happy to eat whatever their master gives them. Your Master loves you. He laid down His life on a cross for you. He forgives you. And so He gives you the very best. He gives Himself to you.

As you come forward, you come like this woman. You bring no works of faith you have done. You bring no goodness of your own. All you bring is a dog, a worthless sinner. But you come with the words, *“Have mercy on me.”* With these words, you join yourself to Jesus, and in bread and wine Jesus joins Himself to you.

I guess it is true that All Dogs Go To Heaven. And, in fact, only dogs go to heaven. Dogs like this woman, and like you, who through faith are joined to Jesus Christ. Amen.