

Matthew 15:21-28

Last week Jesus saved Peter out of the waves despite his little faith. Today He helps a woman who has great faith. Two weeks ago He fed over five thousand people, yet not because of great or little faith on their part, but only because they were hungry. So called “faith healers” say they cannot help those whom, they claim, do not have enough faith. And yet St. Paul was not cured of his “thorn in the flesh,” but who of us would question his faith?

If God only helped people with faith, and plenty of it, Peter would have drowned, and today most in our world would be without food and shelter; their bodies would be filled with all manner of diseases, and no medicine would be able to cure them. But this is hardly the case. You do not see warning labels on bottles of Advil: *Caution...this will only help your headache if you believe in the Lord God.* God makes His sun to shine on the evil and the righteous. The active ingredient in medicine is not our faith, but God’s grace.

So here’s a question...would Jesus have helped the woman in our text if her faith had not been great? Suppose she had become discouraged after Jesus ignored her, or after He called her a dog, and she had walked away from Him. Would He have let her go, or would He have gone after her calling: Hey, wait for Me! I’ll help you anyway, despite your little faith; after all, I saved Peter, and his faith was not very impressive.

Well think of this...throughout His ministry we’re told that Jesus would heal everyone who came to Him. He didn’t put up a tent outside the city of Capernaum with the sign: Healings for those who have faith. We know that He rebuked the people of Capernaum for their lack of faith, and yet He healed all their diseases.

What’s different about the woman in our text is that she should not have had faith. She is a Canaanite woman. God ordered His people, under Joshua, to exterminate all the Canaanites when they entered the land. But they failed to obey. They killed most, but not all. This woman’s ancestors slipped through the cracks. And so here she is...a pagan lady who is alive in Jesus’ day, 1,400 years after Joshua, and like everyone else in the world she has a family with real needs. In her case, a daughter who is not demon possessed, but who is oppressed by a demon, and severely so. We can imagine all the hell she and her daughter have been through. Sleepless nights. Anguish of body and soul. We don’t know how this demon has been oppressing her daughter, but it was cruel and torturous. This, sadly, is the agony many will endure forever, and there will be no help and no hope for them.

But for this woman there was help and there was hope. Jesus had come. She had heard of Him. More than that, she believes in Him. “*Son of David,*” she calls Him. This is a Messianic title. She believes that Jesus is the Promised Savior; the One who would gain victory over the devil for God’s people.

But who does she think she is? She is not one of God’s people. She is not a blood descendant of Abraham. She does not belong to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She believes that Jesus is the Lord and Savior, but how is it that she believes He is *her* Lord and Savior?

Word spread in those days. Especially word of the miracles Jesus performed; His miracles of healing, but also His feeding of the five thousand. It had just happened, and this woman would have heard of it. Jesus fed over five thousand Jews. He gave bread to those who are God’s people. They all ate and were satisfied.

So how does this help the Canaanite woman? She was not entitled to a place at that dinner table. She was a Canaanite dog, as Jesus puts it. She was allowed to live, but her place was under the table.

Do you realize that we are just like her? We are not Canaanites, but we are Gentiles. Gentile dogs is how the Jews would put it. God chose Abraham and He made His promise to his descendants. The Israelites became His chosen people. You and I have no seat with our name on it. The blood of Abraham does not run through our veins. Our place is with the other dogs under the table.

So why is it that we become proud of ourselves? We're simply Gentile dogs. We have no reason to think highly of ourselves. And we have no right to tell God how He must deal with us. And yet here is this woman...in essence, one of us, who refuses to leave. It's not that she's proud. She's not arrogant. She's not demanding; she's crying. She's pitiful. She has no shame. The disciples are embarrassed by her. She's the relative who refuses to leave, and simply will not take any hints. There's one in every family. Well this woman is the one in the Canaanite family. Most decent folks would have left by now. But not her. She is a broken record begging for help.

But that's what faith is. Faith clings to Jesus no matter what. It is impossible to keep people with faith apart from Jesus. And so we see Peter last week getting out of the boat and walking on the water toward Jesus. Not hell or high water, or even common sense, can keep him away.

Christians today seem to have more common sense than Peter had. And that's too bad. We're not fanatical about coming to Jesus like Peter was. We come on our terms...when we've had plenty of sleep on Saturday night; when our odd jobs around the house are done; when it fits into our schedule.

Well that demon oppressing her daughter did not fit into that woman's schedule. She was driven to Jesus by her pressing need. Now here's the truth...if we understood our sinfulness as a dire, pressing need, nothing could keep us away from Jesus - from His words of life to us; from His forgiveness for us in the Sacrament. The disciples despised this woman, but we should be just like her. She had faith, says Jesus; great faith.

But faith in what? Here's what...and her reply gives it away...she knew that she was but a Gentile dog. She had no right to sit down with those 5,000+ Jews and feast on the bread they were eating. But she knew that Jesus had given two commands that day. The first command was to have the people sit down to eat. The second command was to gather up all that was left over after the people ate. And they gathered twelve baskets full.

Now she could eat. These leftovers, these scraps, were for her. "*It is not right,*" Jesus said to her, "*to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*" Her answer flowed out of her faith. It's why she was there. "*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*" "You will help me, Jesus...that's why You gathered up all the leftovers...for dogs like me."

And for dogs like us. We don't need Abraham's blood coursing through our veins. We have Jesus' blood pouring out of His wounds on the cross. That blood was sprinkled on your head because Jesus commanded: "*Baptize all nations.*" "Baptize everyone...Jew and Gentile, those who have a seat at the table and those who are the dogs under the table."

When you come forward to the altar, you do not come with head held high. You and I should walk up here on our knees, for you and I are pitiful dogs who do not even deserve a place here. But there were twelve baskets full after the people ate. And those leftovers are here for dogs like us so that we, too, can eat and be satisfied.

God may, or may not, heal your disease. It's not up to your faith; it's up to His grace. But this is certain: He will, and He does, forgive your sinfulness. Jesus died for everyone. For Jews and Gentiles, for the children at the table and for the dogs under the table.

I think Jesus ignored the woman in our text more for our sake than for hers. He knew she would not leave. But will we? He wants us to be like her. Know your place as a dog. But also know there are twelve full baskets which are just for you. Amen.