

## Sermon for the Lent 2 Reminiscere – Matthew 15:21-28

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Last week on our Lenten journey, the devil took aim at our Lord. It was a head-on all out attack on the Christ who was weary through suffering in the desert. Our Lord prevailed, but now that devil sets his sights on weaker opponents, yes, those who would trust in the Savior. It happens to be a gentile woman from Canaan and her daughter, but by extension, he is aiming at all gentiles, even us.

The devil has afflicted the woman's daughter by demon possession. So the Canaanite woman calls out to the Lord. At this point in the Gospel, St. Matthew has recorded 14 miracles performed by Christ. No doubt the news of this compassionate and truly divine healer had reached even the far regions of Tyre and Sidon. Perhaps this woman knew something of this Messiah. Could He be the promised Son of David, yes, the very God who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner? In Him she trusted. The God who did miracles and forgave sinners, this is the Word to which she would cling and not let go. She had every hope that He would release her daughter from demon possession.

This is certainly an admirable trust in our Savior. Why wouldn't the Lord grant her this desire for her daughter to be healed? But God doesn't always act in the way we would expect. He said through the prophet Isaiah, "... My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways." This Canaanite woman had heard of Jesus' fame; He'd done 14 miracles at this point: healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, cleansing lepers among other things; some miracles were even for the gentiles. Would His reputation of having mercy also be true in her time of need? She calls out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." His response? The Lord is silent as a stone. It's not as though he hadn't heard her. She had called out in a loud voice. Will He not receive her? Was her good faith and confidence in vain? Was His good reputation a lie? Is He not a gracious and friendly God? Can she not depend upon the promise that God had no pleasure in the death of a sinner? This experience would tell her "no": God cares nothing for her. But the Word she trusted still said "yes!" God cares!

Then the disciples plead her case: "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." "Do what she wants, so she'll leave us alone." And while the Lord's silence before left this matter in some ambiguity, now His speaking appears to be anything but unclear. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And who was she? Only a Canaanite woman. She had no claim whatsoever to be considered a sheep of the house of Israel. Perhaps now her feelings tell her, "What's the use? His totally exclusive mission does not include me. My heart must let go of all hope in the Word of promise."

But in desperation she cries out, "Lord, help me." Our Lord's response is even more scathing and, well, just downright degrading. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The so-called merciful and loving Lord first ignored the Canaanite woman. Then, it seems, He excluded her from His mission of saving the lost. Finally, and if that weren't enough, He calls her a dog, even a dog who is

unworthy of the children's bread and His divine gifts. The Canaanite woman's experience tells her this is not merciful man who will help me. Her feelings tell her that it would have been far better for her to never have bothered seeking Him out in the first place, rather than have to endure being ignored and insulted.

And yet, this woman doesn't trust in her feelings and in her experience. She continues to trust the Word of promise. The Son of God takes to pleasure in the death of a sinner. In fact, she catches Him in the truthful insult that He called her. How did she respond? Did you hear it? "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." She agrees with Him. She concedes. She is a dog. But in admitting this, she catches Christ in His own word. "I am a Gentile dog; this is true. But I ask you nothing more than to what a dog is entitled. I ask only for the crumbs that fall from the master's table, yes the table of the Lord." Jesus is caught. What can he say? Dogs really do eat the crumbs that fall to the floor. He let Himself be caught. That's what He wants most. He must stay true to His Word. This woman didn't seek to justify herself by pleading her case to be a descendent of Abraham or a daughter of the name-sake Israel: She called herself a sinner, but sinner nonetheless that Christ would redeem by His name.

This story of the Canaanite woman and Christ is proclaimed for us. Our thoughts, our feelings, and our experience would lead us at times to believe that God really doesn't love us or care about us. How difficult it is to endure another day of being called names, being teased, and bullied. Does God even know or care? How painful and lonely to live life without our loved ones who have been taken by death. Where is God then? Why doesn't God rescue us from the other demons that bind us? Our reason, feelings, and experience would lead us to believe that God has truly abandoned us. But His Word of promise would tell us differently: "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness." The Lord is standing by you and strengthening you.

But God also gives His judgment in His Word. Our rationalizing feelings would tell us that we're only telling the truth with our slanderous and gossiping tongues. Our experience tells us that all guys looks at women lustfully, so what harm is in that? Our human reasoning would tell us that I'll only give respect if respect is given me. That's only fair. But God's Word has something to say against our feelings, reasoning, and clouded conscience. We're gossipers, adulterers, and we despise God's authority. His Word judges us to be sinners. God is right in His judgment. He rebukes us as sinners and declares us unworthy of His Kingdom. You're a sinner. So own it! Don't try to cover your sin. Repent of it. Show it to God. Receive His absolution and forgiveness. Lord it is true. I am a sinner and not worthy of your grace. But you promise to forgive sinners, and you came to call not the righteous, but sinners. What a glorious thing that is! The Great Physician who came not to heal the healthy but the sick. We have caught Christ in His Word and He wants to be caught. Yes, I am a sinner, but I also claim the rights of all sinners, that the Savior has died even for me. We not only eat the crumbs from the master's table, but are welcomed as children who receive bread at the table. Hold Christ to His Word and eternal life is yours. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠