

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"O woman, great is your faith!" (Matthew 15:28). With those words, Jesus healed this woman's daughter instantly.

But it wasn't easy. Oh no! It wasn't easy for this Canaanite woman! Sometimes what we ask of God in our prayers also isn't easy. *"O Lord, please heal me!" "O Lord, please heal my loved one!"* We want our prayers answered. We desire our prayers to be answered. But sometimes we forget that our prayers are not about our will, but His will. Sometimes, we get silence. No answer. And you may even wonder, *"God, are you even listening to me?"*

This morning on this 12th Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus and His disciples travel north of Galilee and into the district of Tyre and Sidon in what is modern Lebanon. This is Gentile territory. This is not a Jewish territory and has never been Jewish territory. Jesus and His disciples are well beyond the historic borders of the Kingdom of Israel.

So, why is Jesus and His disciples in a Gentile territory that has never been a part of Israel? Well, it appears that they did not go there to engage in any compassionate ministry. It appears that they weren't there to preach or to heal. So, why are they there? Well, they are there because things were getting a little too hot for comfort due to Christ's recent confrontation with the Pharisees. So, they're there to take a breather.

But could there be more to just taking some time away? Jesus is beyond the historic Jewish borders for a reason.

"And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon'" (Matthew 15:22).

Now, you may recall that the Jews and the Canaanites have a history. A history that goes all the way back to Moses. You see, Israel was ordered by God to exterminate the Canaanites, because of idol worship (Deuteronomy 20:17). That clearly did not happen, because we have a Canaanite woman coming up to a Jew. What is going through her mind?

Well, clearly, she knows who Jesus is. She has heard about Him. His fame had spread even past Galilee and into the Gentile lands. But this woman doesn't just know of Jesus, she also believes in Him and His power. She trusts in Him. She believes in Him to be the promised Messiah and Redeemer from sin and the devil's power.

Although she was a Canaanite and not a Jew, she believed in the promise of the Gospel. She believed that the Promised Messiah didn't only come for the Jews, but even for her, and all people like her. She believed what Isaiah recorded from God: ***"The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, to love the name of the Lord ... these I will bring to My holy mountain ... for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"*** (Isaiah 56:6, 7).

She believed she was included. She believed in God's promise to Abraham: ***"In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"*** (Genesis 22:18).

You see, this woman's faith rested upon these promises. Her faith was not in herself. She knew that she could not possibly save her daughter. Instead, she clung to the promise that God's offspring would be the Savior for all people – for all sinners, including her. Her faith rested upon *that* promise. This was the only thing that could give her any hope.

But to her cry for help, Jesus did not answer her a word. Jesus stood there in silence.

I thought Jesus was our friend. We just sang how great a friend Jesus is! I thought He was faithful! Jesus what happened? Why are you silent?

Is Jesus denying her request? Is Jesus denying her faith? Is Jesus denying her prayer?

Sometimes, we think God is not listening to our prayers as if we are all alone and He doesn't care.

But then it appears to go from bad to worse for this woman. To end this awkward silence, the disciples beg Jesus, ***"Send her away! Just give her what she wants so she'll leave us alone!"***

To that request, Jesus says to the disciples, ***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*** (Matthew 15:24). This is Jesus saying, "O, you my beloved disciples, I am not here for your convenience or to be a wandering miracle worker. I wasn't sent for her."

Jesus wasn't sent for this her? This is the friend we have in Jesus? Some friend He is! How can we say that Christ loves this woman and her daughter, considering what she is experiencing? But Jesus knows this woman's heart. He is treating her this way to know the true nature of her heart. Where is her faith? Who is she trusting? Through these afflictions, her faith is turning from self-reliance to only Jesus Himself.

As this woman overheard Jesus say that He didn't come for her, she persists as she kneels before Him – *she worships Him* – and says, “**Lord, help me**” (Matthew 15:25).

Now, Jesus speaks. But if His words were harsh before, they are even worse now. “**It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs**” (Matthew 15:26). Yes, you heard that right, Jesus is calling this woman a dog. Here, Jesus is making a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews are called “children” and the Gentiles are called dogs.

But how does this woman respond? Does she get defensive saying, “*How dare you!*”? No. She actually agrees with Him. “*Yes, Lord, I am a dog.*” She receives His word and simply agrees.

“**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table**” (Matthew 15:27).

She believed. She agreed with Jesus. “*You're right Lord, I am a dog. I am a sinner. I don't deserve Your help. I have no right to ask You for help. But if it is Your will, You are my only hope. I will never let go. For without You, I have no hope.*”

To this, Jesus says, “**O woman, great is your faith**” (Matthew 15:28) and her daughter was healed instantly.

This Canaanite woman was persistent. But it wasn't her persistence that necessarily got the results. It was her faith. Her faith was great because the object of her faith was Jesus and His saving word. Jesus was not being mean to this woman. He was treating this woman this way to reveal the true faith in her heart.

You see, the struggles that we face day after day with our sin and our constant temptations from Satan, the world, and our very nature, are used by God to draw us away from relying upon ourselves to relying upon Him. Faith believes in the Gospel and cries out to God for help.

So, we do have a friend in Jesus! He did come for this Canaanite woman and her daughter. He came for you and for me!

So, yes, God is listening to your prayers! And He doesn't *just* listen. He also answers every single prayer with His good and gracious divine will. But like the Canaanite woman, yours and my prayers are not always answered immediately. It may appear as if God isn't listening, but He is. He reveals His will to you and to me as *yes, no, or not yet* though His Word. He speaks to us and answers us in His Holy written Word. So, if it appears He isn't listening, maybe it's not Him who isn't listening, but you. Yes, God can work miracles outside of His Word, but it is always best to look where He always promises to be found: in His Word and His Sacraments.

The good and gracious will of God is that all people would be saved from their sins. The good and gracious will of God is that all people would come to His house of prayer. But for that to happen, humanity would have to be brought back to God. Jesus who came for the lost sheep of Israel, also came for the dogs. He is the Savior for the Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus became man to suffer and die in our place. As poor, miserable sinners, we deserve that cross, we deserve that pain, we deserve that death. We deserve all that because we have turned from God and to sin. But God would not have all of humanity perish. God ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as a ransom for all”*** (1 Timothy 2:4-6).

The Canaanite woman is an illustration of how we all ought to be. We also ought to have a persistent faith. We ought to have faith that loves God's Word. The faith that clings to God's Word. The faith that clings to His Sacraments. For there is no hope for us apart from God and His Word and Sacraments.

Like the Canaanite woman, our access to God is not dependent on our merits. She had no merits. She was an outsider. She was a sinner. Even so, she prayed. She prayed relentless. She would not let go but held fast in worship to Jesus. May we follow her example as we lay our burdens before Christ focusing on Him alone as the object of our faith. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +