

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 7, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 15:21-28

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

An employee comes into work one day, sees the normally easy-going and fun-loving boss on an angry rampage, and asks, “*What got into him?*” Parents turn to their rebellious teenager and say, “*We don’t know you anymore! What has happened to you?*” A wife in a troubled marriage turns to the counselor and says, “*He has changed. My husband doesn’t love me the way he used to love me. Something is different.*” Even the most patient, loving, and caring person can have a bad day. They suddenly appear to be unlike the person we’ve come to know. They act differently from the way we are used to them acting. Sometimes a person isn’t just having one bad day, but that person actually changes. They develop a new attitude and a different outlook on life. They are different.

I mention these things because as we look at our Gospel lesson we might ask this today of Jesus. At first glance, this doesn’t appear to be the same Jesus we have come to know. Is Jesus having a bad day? At first glance, Jesus seems different. Has something changed? Did Jesus change? Is this the same loving, caring, patient, and perfect Jesus that we have grown accustomed to seeing? On this beautiful morning God has provided for us, I want us to consider this question: **Is this the same Jesus we know?**

If there was anyone who had an excuse to be in a bad mood it would have been Jesus. His cousin, John the Baptist, was recently beheaded by wicked king Herod. When Jesus tried to go to a private place and get some rest, a group of 5000 men, not even including women & children, came to Jesus. After Jesus feed them they tried to make Jesus their earthly king by force. In the very early hours of the next morning Jesus met and rebuked His frightened disciples on the sea. Then Jesus just had another run in with the Pharisees. It’s not surprising then, to hear “***Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.***” Jesus leaves the Jewish territory of Capernaum, the territory of Herod, and goes northwest toward the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon to have some quiet time with his disciples. Mark tells us that Jesus “***entered a house and did not want anyone to know it.***” (7)

But Jesus’ presence does not stay a secret for very long, even in a heathen land. “***A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."*** This woman comes to Jesus and asks for help. She evidently has not only heard about Jesus’ miracles, but also about His Messianic claims. She calls Jesus more than just Lord. She calls Jesus: “***Son of David.***”

This is a clear reference to the Messiah - the Anointed One who would save the people. Whatever she knew about the promised Messiah, she believed Jesus was He. So she begs Him for mercy. She asks Jesus to take pity on her. As a mother, her heart is breaking because her ***“daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”***

So here comes a woman, confessing Jesus as the Messiah (something Jesus’ own disciples have yet to confidently confess). Here comes this woman with faith in Jesus, humbly begging for His help. Her daughter is terribly sick. How would you expect the Jesus you know to respond? How might the Jesus we love answer? ***“Jesus did not answer a word.”*** What? He says nothing. He gives her the silent treatment. He gives no response to this woman in need. Jesus, who looks at people and has compassion on them, Jesus, who comes to seek and save the lost, does not answer a word! Was Jesus having a bad day? Has Jesus changed?

If we are surprised, it had to be somewhat surprising to Jesus’ disciples as well. They urge Jesus, ***“Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”*** You cannot tell it in the English, but in the Greek, they are pleading with Jesus to just give her what she wants and get rid of her. But they are saying this not out of mercy, but they want her gone because she keeps after them. She is relentless and they want Jesus to grant her request & send her away.

Jesus, turning to His disciples, now says this: ***He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”*** What? Isn’t this Jesus, the Lamb of God, who has come to take away the sin of the *world*? Yes, it is true that Jesus came from Israel, and His public ministry centered in Israel. But the Jesus we know wants all to be saved. The Jesus we love send out His disciples telling them to baptize all nations and to preach the good news into all of the world. What a strange answer! Is this really the same Jesus we know?

Hearing Jesus’ reply to His disciples, this woman now comes and kneels before Jesus, and simply cries, ***“Lord, help me!”*** Ok, now for sure our Jesus will snap out of it, right! Now how would you expect your Jesus to answer this persistent, loving parent? Certainly, we will hear Jesus speak caring and gentle words of love and healing. Not exactly! Jesus says: ***“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”*** What do you think about this reply? Jesus tells her it would not be right to take what belongs to the children of Israel and feed it to the Gentiles or the dogs. Please understand that the word Jesus uses for dog is not the derogatory word often used by Jews to refer to Gentiles. It was not a street or wild dog. Instead, the word Jesus uses means pet or a lap dog. This dog is allowed in the house, but still does not have all the privileges that the children do. Yet, is Jesus going to dismiss this woman just like this? Is this the same Jesus we know?

Have we ever been in the shoes of this woman? When is the last time you or a person you love was suffering terribly? Have you ever approached your Lord and Savior again and again in prayer about something on your heart only to have God not answer a word? Have the devil’s lies about God not really loving you or that His grace isn’t really for someone like you ever gotten to you? If you ever feel for a second that God is not answering, that your Savior doesn’t really care, that His love is not meant for you, open up these words of Scripture once again and take more than a first glance.

Then, like this woman keep going to Jesus. ***“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”*** She will be satisfied with the crumbs as long as they come from the Savior. That’s all she wants & needs from Jesus, the great Messiah. And was she ever right! ***Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”*** Is this the same Jesus we know? You bet it is! Jesus was not ignoring this woman. Jesus was not being rude to her. Jesus was

not acting this way because He was having a bad day or because He had changed. Jesus cared about her faith. He was testing it. He wanted her to continue to cry out to Him. He wanted His disciples to keep hearing her cries. Jesus was listening to her even as He did not answer a word. Jesus was caring for her even as He tells His disciples He came for the lost in Israel. Jesus was showing love for her even as He tested her by saying the food was not for the dogs.

Jesus, in reality, was acting no different because He was acting in love. He commends this woman for her great faith. This is only the second place in the Gospels where Jesus commends someone for having a great faith - the other was also a Gentile - the centurion. I wonder how the disciples felt about this after just recently being rebuked for having such little faith. Probably the same way you and I feel for so often doubting God's love and promises. But more than this I pray we are encouraged as we watch Jesus interact with this Canaanite woman. For in the same way, Jesus listens to our every cry and He answers at just the right time and in just the right way with what is best for us. There will be times Jesus wants to test and strengthen our faith.

So keep crying out to the ***"Son of David."*** He answers all our doubts about God's love for us and all our questions about *"where is God when we need Him"* with a cross. There He has taken care of our greatest needs. Our sins have been paid for by His blood, and Jesus' righteousness is ours as a free gift. Our God chose to enter a relationship with us, a relationship that would cost Him everything and us nothing. That is where our God is when we needed Him, suffering our hell so that we will be in heaven! There are no more questions about Jesus' love for us, or for the world for that matter. Jesus' love doesn't leave anyone with the crumbs! He offers Himself, the Bread of Life, to all people.

Is this the same Jesus we know? As we dig a bit deeper into God's Word here the answer is simple and certain. This is the Jesus we know! How comforting it is to know that Jesus never takes it out on us because He is having a bad day. Jesus never gets tired of us or wants to send us away. So the next time we find ourselves or our loved ones suffering terribly, I pray we imitate this woman. Go to Jesus. Go in faith. Go persistently. Go with confidence knowing this is the same Jesus we know - the One who bled, and died, and rose again to save us. Take comfort in the fact that, while people may change, our Jesus - ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever"*** (Hebrew 13). Amen.