



Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday of Pentecost 2017

Great faith!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• [The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 15, 21-28](#)

- 21 And when he had gone out from there, Jesus withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon.
- 22 And look, a Canaanite woman from those regions came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is being terribly demon-possessed!”
- 23 But he did not answer to her a word. And when his disciples had approached, they began to ask him, saying, “Send her away, because she is crying after us.”
- 24 But he answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep, the house of Israel.”
- 25 But when she had come, she kept on paying homage to him, saying, “Lord, help me!”
- 26 And he answered and said, “To take the children’s bread and to throw [it] to the dogs is not good.”
- 27 And she said, “Yes, Lord, for even the dogs eat from the crumbs that are falling from their masters’ table.”
- 28 Thereupon Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, your faith is *great!* Let it be for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will realise the universal significance Jesus has for our Life. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of God!**

- To be able to treasure what happens in this part of Jesus’ story, we have to see the contrast between the Canaanite woman and the Pharisees and Scribes.
- Matthew provides some details of the woman who was so persistent with Jesus. She was a Canaanite woman in the district of Tyre and Sidon. The Canaanites are descendants of Ham, the youngest son of Noah, who sinned against Noah by unashamedly observing the nakedness and drunkenness of his father. Noah cursed Ham by saying, [Gen 10,25-27] *“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall be to his brothers.” He also said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let*

Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."

- This woman came from this cursed servant nation, the cursed Gentile or heathen nation. They were not part of the Israelites, who were descendants of Shem, the oldest son of Noah. Strictly speaking Jesus, during His earthly ministry, was not sent to anyone but to the lost sheep- yes they were LOST sheep- of the house of Israel. Later, at Pentecost, Jesus' ministry would officially open up to all nations, to all tongues and languages through His Apostles, especially through Paul.
- But at that moment in time, she was out of bounds. And yet she cried: *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* She was crying for her daughter. Demon possession- what a terrible thing.
- On the other hand we have the Pharisees and scribes. They were of the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus was explicitly sent to them first.
- Now, we need to be careful here, because we must be fair to the Pharisees. Everyone knows who a Pharisee is, right? The popular notion is that it is someone who clings to the Law of God too strictly. He points fingers to others whilst he himself does not keep the Law. Is this what Jesus says?
- Let's see: Did Jesus reprimand them for clinging too much to the Law of God? Not in a million years! Jesus accused them of changing the Law of God, in this case the 4th Commandment, to suite themselves, and to then make a new law out of it with a new authority calling it the law of the elders! And furthermore Jesus accused them of judging His disciples as being unclean because they ate without washing their hands beforehand- another one of their man-made traditions which also belonged to the law of the elders.
- Against them Jesus teaches that nothing that goes into the mouth makes one unclean. That means all food is clean. But, what comes out of the mouth, namely false teachings, makes one unclean, because it reveals an unclean heart. If the teachings are not according to God's Word it reveals an unclean thinking!
- In other words, they, who assumed to be clean, because they were following the human laws of their elders, were in fact unclean, because they did not adhere to the original Word of God, to the pure Law of God! Jesus nails them in this regard!
- Now, who are they in our times?
- Answer: There is no human being under the sun who does not adhere to some laws of some "elders" in his/her life. Strictly speaking, there is no such a thing as a lawless human being. The only question which remains is: what laws are foundational for him or her? We all tend to justify ourselves against the backdrop of some or other law.

- But what about the saying in the Bible of the lawless one who will rise close to the end? When the Word of God speaks about lawlessness it is always only with regard to God's Law. God's Law is the standard. There is no other Law that has authority over God's Law. That includes the Human Rights. Wherever they stand against the Law of God we, as Christians, should not follow them.
- Therefore, anyone who does not fully comply with God's Law, even with the spiritual meaning of God's Law, which Jesus revealed in His sermon on the mount, is unclean before God!
- Now, we come back to the Canaanite women. Unlike the Pharisees and scribes, she knows that she is unclean. She is not of Israel. She was asking for healing, from a demon, not for herself, but for her daughter. She acknowledged that Jesus was Lord and the Son of David- that is- she confessed that Jesus is God and man and of course she trusted that He could help her daughter. She knew that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews! This is formidable, completely unexpected.
- Initially, Jesus reacts in a way which is completely offensive to our modern insistence of openness and inclusiveness and equality because, *"He did not answer her a word"*. Astonishing!
- Jesus had a very good reason for not responding to her. Jesus explains with His famous words: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* Jesus also was following orders. Christ Jesus was only and specifically sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- And then Jesus straightforwardly tells her, [26] *"To take the children's bread and to throw [it] to the dogs is not good."*
- Did you get it? Jesus referred to her as "dog", which was the same as "unclean pagan". It was offensive in those days. Imagine Jesus had said that on Facebook in our super-sensitised culture!!
- But, what does the woman do about this? Again, astonishing, she acknowledged Jesus' answer: 'Yes that is true. I am not asking for the bread from the table, dear Messiah. I know I am not worthy to ask for the bread from Your table. I only ask for the crumbs that fall off the table which the dogs (I am one of them) are allowed to eat. I am happy with the crumbs of Your table, Lord. Please allow me the crumbs for my daughter.'
- And Jesus says, *"O woman, your faith is great! Let it be for you as you wish."* That's faith in Jesus. She is one of the poor in the Spirit, whom Jesus blesses. She knows her unworthiness- she is poor, she is unclean. Yes, Lord, that's me. And she receives her crumb, which is, her daughter is healed from demon possession. What a crumb!

- Jonas received much more than the crumbs fallen from the Lord's table, today, when he was baptised as little child into the Body of Christ. He is just like the Canaanite women in that he also came as someone who could only receive from God, not able to give!
- The same is true for all of us who have been baptised, who have received the word of Absolution, the word of forgiveness spoken to us today, after confessing our inability to keep God's Law to the full! We have received much more than the crumb today. That is only because God in His Grace has opened up His kingdom for all nations. All people of all nations- no age restrictions- may become disciples of the Lord by baptism and by receiving the instruction Jesus has commanded His servants of the Word to give to the baptised [Mt 28,16-20].
- They may eat of the bread on the Lord's table, that is first of all, they may hear and receive the Lord's Word of the Cross, which creates faith in them. And, part of the teaching is the Lord's Supper, of which they may also participate once they have confessed their faith in the Words and Works of Jesus Christ.
- This is essentially what the confession "Jesus is Lord" summarises. That Canaanite women had the right faith, because for her, whatever Jesus said was true. Whatever He would say to her, she would go along with what He said and she would ask Him of His mercy! She wanted Him as Messiah for her neighbour. She needed what He gave!
- So in her we find the elements of true faith, trust in Jesus' person, Word and Work and love for the neighbour. That is why Jesus praised her great faith.
- As we saw, we have received much more than the crumbs from Jesus' table today, even as we hear His Word at the very moment. Do you realise what a great gift forgiveness of sins is, if healing from demons is only the crumbs falling from Jesus' table!!
- You have received the Bread from Heaven. And this Word from the heart of God makes you clean to be a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem! And, therefore whatever Jesus says is true and we ask Him for His mercy towards those who are still possessed by the world, by demons, by the spirit of the times and possessed by the ME-culture. May the Lord have mercy on them too. Amen.
- *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*