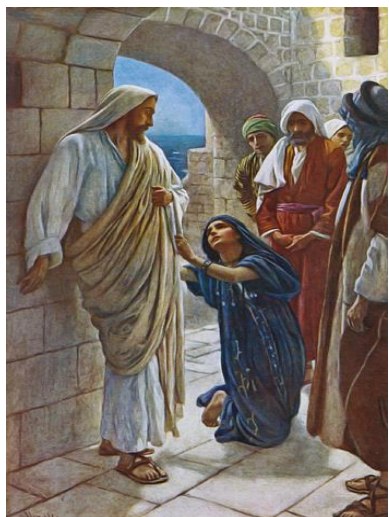


16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 8, 2024



The Woman of Canaan by Harold Copping

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***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: What good is it if we say we love all people, but give special treatment to a few?

MANY: God calls us to love others as deeply as we love ourselves, with no strings attached.

What good is it if we say we want God to show mercy

towards us, but are quick to judge others?

God calls us to forgive our sisters and brothers, to let mercy triumph over judgment.

What good is it if we say we trust God in every moment, but live guided by our fears?

We will speak and act as those who trust God to come and live in our fearful hearts.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

We find it a lot easier to play favorites, rather than treating everyone equally. We find it simpler to classify others as 'them,' instead of discovering what makes them beloved in God's eyes. We cling to fear, when we could grasp hold of God's enduring love. Let us confess together all we have done, and not done, which brings hurt to others, and harm to ourselves. Join me, as we pray together, saying,

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

How glibly we say we trust you, Holy One, and how quickly our fears silence our words. We find you at the side of the poor, while we cozy up to the rich and famous. You stand behind the counter serving the hungry at the soup kitchen, while we are stocking our freezers and pantries till they overflow. We look down at those whose hands are dirty, but your hand of mercy pulls them into your embracing

love.

Forgive us, O Lord, and do good to us when we have trouble doing good for others. Surround us with your love; surround us with your grace; surround us with your peace; surround us with the Spirit of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Silence is kept

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

Be strong, do not fear! God comes, to fill your parched souls with living water, to open your eyes to the grace which is yours.

God comes, for no other reason than to save us. This is indeed good news. Thanks be to God. Amen.

GOSPEL: Mark 7:24-37

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. ²⁵ In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't

right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

²⁸ But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." ³⁰ When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

³¹ After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. ³² Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. ³³ Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

³⁴ Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, "*Ephphatha*," which means, "Open up." ³⁵ At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

³⁶ Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. ³⁷ People were overcome with wonder, saying, "He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak."

This is the Word of God. It is true and can be trusted.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Spreading the Good News of the Gospel”

Am I the only one who is upset when Jesus calls the woman “a dog”? This week I read at least 6 commentaries on this passage. Some scholars don’t mention the dog thing at all. Others try to sugar coat it, in my opinion.

But I must confess, and I bet you love when I have a confession to make; I was ignorant of the history of this whole region where Jesus traveled, and #2 I was missing the point, just like we talked about last Sunday. (I’ll mention the second confession later.)

Just like so many family feuds, the disagreement between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman goes way, way, back. In our gospel text it says that Jesus traveled about 30 miles to Tyre and then went to Sidon. These were port cities on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. Both cities had flourishing trade and were very wealthy. They were proud Canaanite cities.

In King David’s day, Tyre was on friendly terms with Israel (according to 2 Samuel), but soon afterward the city became known for its wickedness. Tyre rejoiced when Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C.

because without Israel’s competition, Tyre’s trade and profits would increase. It was into this evil and materialistic culture that Jesus brought his message.

It is interesting that Jesus stressed the importance of inner purity just before visiting Tyre. (You may remember last week when Jesus clarified that what it was that came out of our mouths is what defiles us.)

The woman who approaches Jesus is called a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia, in the gospel of Mark and a Canaanite in the Gospel of Matthew. (Remember that each of our four gospels were written to different audiences and they each had their own agendas.)

Mark’s designation refers to her political background. His Roman audience would easily identify her by the part of the Empire that was her home. In the gospel of Matthew, the author’s description of the woman as a Canaanite was designed for his Jewish audience, who remembered the Canaanites as bitter enemies when Israel was settling the promised land.

According to the Life Application Study Bible, on the surface, Jesus’ words may seem harsh and unsympathetic; but the woman recognized them as a wide-open door to God’s representative. Jesus did not use the negative term for dogs that referred to

scavengers (the word sometimes used by Jews to refer to Gentiles); he used the term for a household pet. (This is the sugar-coating I mentioned.) Be that as it may, the woman did not try to argue.

Instead, she used Jesus' choice of imagery. She pointed out that she was willing to be considered an interruption as long as she could receive God's healing for her daughter. Ironically, many Jews would lose God's spiritual healing because they rejected Jesus, while many Gentiles, whom Jews rejected, would find salvation because they recognized Jesus.

Now comes my second confession. You might remember how many times I have accused the Pharisees and Temple leaders as missing the point of the lessons Jesus was teaching. I just did the same thing, by concentrating on Jesus calling the woman a "dog", be it a doberman or a miniature poodle. The point of this whole passage containing two healing events, is not the name calling.

Instead, the message is all about the willingness of Jesus to share his ministry with people **outside his own neighborhood;**

Outside his culture;

Outside the religion he was born into.

Even though Jesus earlier said he came to save the Jews, his compassion for all people was illustrated in this story. The scholars are divided concerning why Jesus went to this land of Gentiles. Was he really just looking for a place to teach his disciples without the crowds around? We'll never really know.

The real point is that Jesus took this opportunity, however he got there. He was willing to spread the good news that he had been preaching around the Sea of Galilee. He was willing to step out of the box, as we would say today, to go to a place where others might have been afraid or uncomfortable,

To share god's words.

To share god's grace.

To share god's mercy.

To share god's love.

We are being challenged to do the same. This week perhaps each of us could **speak to one person who is not here, and mention how much we enjoy coming to church. Or mention the mission projects you all do. Or mention our wonderful organist and the**

music she shares. Or maybe mention the food we have on Fellowship Sundays.

If you are here, you must have a good reason.

Try sharing that reason with someone else. It's that easy. Step out of your comfort zone, just as Jesus did. And look what he did! He healed someone's daughter when **she** dared to open her mouth! Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer
We praise you, God of Israel, God of the church universal. You made the heavens and the earth, the sparrow and the gull, the whale and the minnow. You care for people, the hungry and the oppressed. You restore sight and help the stooped to stand tall. You give new heart to the bereaved and hopeless. Our hopes are in you and you will not disappoint us at the last. We praise you, Creator, Christ, Comforter. Today we lift up all those on our prayer list and all those we hold dear in our hearts. We pray for all God's people around the world; the oppressed, the frightened, the hungry, the thirsty. May we be the answer to their prayers in any way we can. In your Son's Holy name, we pray all these things. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your name. Thy kingdom come; Thy

will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as, we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

***RESPONSIVE BLESSING AND SENDING:**

God sends us forth to love all people, no strings attached.

We will share grace and hope with everyone.

Jesus sends us forth to forgive our sisters and brothers.

We will offer mercy, not judgment, to those around us.

The Spirit sends us forth to trust God in every moment.

We will live in faith, not in fear, sharing our hearts with all we meet. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: