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Matthew 15:21-28 – *A Place at the Table*

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Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

²³ 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.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Last week we loaded up the car—

 Packed our bags in the van—

And were ready to get on our way to BC.

The girls climbed into their car seats...

 Began the buckling up process themselves...

 And mom and dad got in position to do the final inspection.

As I was reaching down to tighten Sarah’s belt...

 I noticed a fairly large red spot below her knee.

The spot was red, warm to the touch, and swollen.

There was no visible wound...

But it was the same area where she had a scrape not too long ago.

What do you do?

“Let’s monitor it.”

“We’ll drive to BC...”

“And if it doesn’t get better, we’ll take her in when we get to Prince George.”

That was dad’s plan.

Kristi was hesitant but went along with it...

Until about a half hour into the drive...

When mom instincts kicked in.

Having consulted with Doctor Google...

She decided we needed to take her in for antibiotics to help fight the infection...

After all she’s only three and a spreading infection could do some damage to her little body.

Of course, it was Sunday and the majority of Medicentres are closed.

So, we stopped at WestView Hospital in Stony Plain...

Over a 4 hour wait.

So, we drove back into Edmonton to the Stollery.

There were 10 people in front of us...

Just waiting to be seen by the triage nurse.

We waited 1.5 hours with little progress...

Until Kristi found a walk-in clinic with a shorter wait time.

She was determined to get her daughter help.

After the 4 or 5-hour ordeal...

We finally saw a doctor and got some antibiotics for her.

Thankfully that’s the end of the story.

Mom instincts won the day and nothing got worse.

That’s how I want you to view the woman in our passage today.

A mother desperate to find her daughter help.

Sarah had a little leg infection.

This woman's daughter is "demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

I want you to hear the desperation in her voice as she calls out to Jesus:

"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"My daughter is sick!"

If your child has ever been sick...

You know how this woman feels:

Helpless;

Out of control;

Desperate;

Scared. [PAUSE]

But Jesus doesn't answer her...

Not even a word.

The mother cries out after Jesus...

But he doesn't turn around and talk to her...

He doesn't even acknowledge her.

Thinking, from his silence, that they know how Jesus feels about this woman...

The disciples urge him:

"Send her away!"

"This lady...won't...stop!"

"Just tell her to beat it!"

You see, this woman is a Gentile...

Coming from the region of Tyre and Sidon...

Coming from Paganland. (Scott Hoezee)

She's not a Jew...

She's not one of them.

In fact, we're told she's a "Canaanite." (15:22)

To a Jew, there is nothing of value being a Canaanite...

These are Israel's enemies.

In the OT, it's the Canaanites who the Lord tells his people to steer clear of.

They worship other gods...

And they can lead Israel away from Yahweh.

It's no surprise that the disciples want Jesus to send this woman away—

Although she's desperate;

Although she's seeking help for her daughter;

Although she's crying out to Jesus in royal titles—

The disciples still want her gone...

Because she's not one of them.

The disciples are in a position of power:

They're walking with the man they know to be the Son of David;

They're walking with the man who teaches with God's authority;

They're walking with the man who heals skin diseases, calms storms, and raises the dead.

This is their teacher and friend.

They're in close with him.

They're in a position of power.

And what they want is for this woman—

Who is not like them—

To stop bothering them and Jesus.

Hopefully this gives us pause.

Hopefully this causes us to ask and examine for ourselves:

"Who am I turning away from?"

"In my position of power and privilege..."

"Who am I avoiding?"

“Who is making me uncomfortable?”

“Who is not like me in their dress, skin color, language, beliefs, economic class...”

“And I’ve put up a wall between me and them?”

“They make me feel uncomfortable...”

“So, I’m just going to push them away.”

Maybe it’s our brothers and sisters who come over from Africa, Asia, or the Middle East...

Coming from less-than-ideal conditions in their home country to live in Canada.

And with them they bring their expression of Christianity:

They dress a little differently;

They worship in different ways;

Their beliefs emphasize different things about God.

And I’m sure most of us think:

“Welcome. I’m glad you’re here! We’re brothers and sisters in Christ.”

But maybe on a deeper level—

A level we’re unaware of, we think:

“Just don’t ask me to change for you.”

“Don’t inconvenience me.”

“Don’t ask me to sing your songs.”

“Don’t ask me to care about the same things you care about.”

“You can be here and worship, just don’t interrupt my life...”

“Send her away Jesus, she keeps crying out after us.”

Maybe today we’re uncomfortable with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are Roman Catholic.

There is a lot of anger being directed at the Catholic Church today...

Churches are being burned down because of their role in Residential Schools...

People are enraged over wrongs committed against the Indigenous people.

And we very quickly want to separate ourselves from them:

Saying, “That’s not us.”

“We’re Protestant, not Catholic.”

“Send her away Jesus, she keeps crying out after us...”

“She’s not one of us.”

Or maybe it’s just people who are suffering.

We don’t want to take the time and effort to empathize with them.

If it’s not our problem—

Not our race, not our class, not our religion, not our neighborhood—

Then we don’t want to be bothered by it.

“Send her away Jesus, she keeps crying out after us...”

How are we like the disciples...

Not wanting to be inconvenienced by people different from us...

People we’d rather not associate with or give ourselves to?

This is a problem because **God welcomes the despised...**

God welcomes those the world ignores...

God welcomes those we turn away.

But there’s something we need to address first...

Because I bet you’ve been thinking about it.

What do we do with Jesus’ actions and language here?

First, he outright ignores the woman in need.

Then, when he does acknowledge her...

He uses demeaning language calling her a “dog.”

I would have been pretty upset if the doctor refused to treat our daughter...

Seeing that I was of Irish descent calling us “Paddys” or “Mics.”

Jesus uses the common, offensive slur for Gentiles...

Grouping her with the “dogs.”

Some people use this passage to say that Jesus was racist...

That this woman confronts his racism and teaches him a better way.

Some people use this to say that Jesus himself was learning that salvation was not based on ethnicity—

It wasn't just for the Jews and Jesus was learning that—

And that this conversation moved Jesus forward in that understanding.

This *is* a hard/uncomfortable passage to read...

But I think we can do better considering the whole context.

We're talking about bread here:

“It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.”

“It's not right to take from Israel and give it to the Gentiles.”

We're talking about who gets a place at the table:

Who is fed by the Messiah?

Is it only the Jews, or is it Gentiles too?

If we stop at 15:26 (it's not right to take from the children...) ...

Then we *do* get this very inaccurate picture of Jesus and his mission.

But if we look at other pieces of Matthew's Gospel—

Not to mention the end of this story—

We see that those sitting at the table are quite the diverse group:

1. Right after this interaction with the Canaanite woman...

Jesus feeds 4,000 people.

All of the evidence says that it is a group of Gentiles Jesus feeds.

The bread of life giving bread to non-Jews. (Matthew 15:29-39)

2. Before our passage there is a Roman Centurion who is commended for his faith...

Another Gentile, this time a Roman soldier, at the table. (Matthew 8:5-13)

3. In our passage the woman is commended for her faith.

A Canaanite woman—

An enemy—

Invited to the table.

4. Jesus himself has Canaanite blood in him.

Rahab, Tamar, and Ruth—

All mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1—

Were all Gentiles...some even Canaanite.

5. Maybe the clearest indicator of all is the Great Commission.

Jesus says, "Make disciples of all nations."

All ethnicities.

"The only qualifier is their faith in me."

In our passage it seems that Jesus is going along with the prejudice—

He's playing into the culture...

Drawing his disciples in;

Drawing this woman in—

Because he's about to undermine it.

Jesus does not send this Canaanite woman away.

He engages with her...

Drawing her in...

Eventually holding open his arms to her...

Welcoming her to the table.

Because this is what God does:

God welcomes in the despised;

God welcomes in the ones the world turns away.

In Matthew's Gospel we see Jesus expanding the boundaries of God's Kingdom.

It's not dependent on social standing, skin color, or where you're born.

Entrance into God's Kingdom—

Finding a seat at the table—

Is based on faith in Jesus Christ...

Trusting that he is the Lord of the Universe and Savior of our sins...

That he loves you enough to welcome you into his family.

Who do you identify with in this story?

Where were you reading yourself in?

Are you the privileged disciples...

The ones who decide who's in and who's out?

Are you the Messiah...

Playing the role of savior to the woman in need?

In my thought and experience...

I have a tendency to see myself as one of these two in stories like this.

I'm either walking with Christ as a disciple...

Or I'm helping someone in need.

But is this accurate?

Am I not more like the Canaanite...

Born outside the family as a Gentile?

Do I come to Jesus with my life put together...

Or do I come to Jesus in desperation?

Am I the strong and able one in the story...

Or am I the one kneeling in need, crying for help...

Hoping that he'll show me mercy?

When I strip away my pride...

When I look at myself honestly...

I am like the Canaanite woman.

I have nothing to give to Jesus...

But I have everything to gain.

Because of my sin I'm separated from him.

But because of his grace, he welcomes me to the table.

He takes this outsider...

And prepares a place for me next to other people who come in need.

Not because I deserve it—

Did the Canaanite woman deserve mercy?—

But because he chooses to love.

And if God is in the business of welcoming “outsiders” ...

Shouldn't I be too?

Shouldn't we all?

Everything we have—

Including the most important gift of being welcomed into God's family—

Is only by an act of God's grace.

We don't deserve it.

We didn't work for any of it.

It was given to us.

God met us in our desperation...

And gave us life.

Shouldn't we be about his business?

Shouldn't we allow God to make a place at the table for people as undeserving as us? [PAUSE]

So, may we seek out God's Spirit—

May we depend on God to do this work through us...

Because this is impossible work without him—

And may we open our lives to those God places in our midst.

Amen.

