

PENTECOST 11, A – August 16, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Psalm 28; Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Romans 11:1ff; Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matt. 15)

Boy, what a year 2020 has been! If you remember, it actually started out ok. The winter was very mild. I for one didn't miss having no snow to shovel! But, then, the pandemic hit. Schools closed... businesses shut down... churches closed... there was no eating out... vacations were canceled. And then, when things finally started improving – worship resuming... restaurants opening up again (somewhat) – it got miserably hot... and the pandemic began resurging in places. Then, a storm knocked out our power for days. Man, can't we catch a break?!

**What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!** (LSB 770)

It's a beautiful hymn, a nice sentiment. But, what do you do when God doesn't listen? When your prayers don't make any difference or change anything... like now? I mean, you've been praying for an end to the pandemic, haven't you? I have. We have in church on Sunday's. How come things haven't changed? Isn't Jesus our friend?

Our hymn says He is. But, Jesus didn't seem to know this hymn or be singing it when a poor Canaanite woman came to him and pleaded, **"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."** He did not answer her... not even a word. He ignored her. Gee: what kind of a friend ignores you? What kind of a friend says, *"I didn't come to help your kind."* What kind of a friend calls you a dog? This Jesus isn't so easy to follow, is He?

Did you know that there are 366 books in the "For Dummies" series? You know the books: *PC's For Dummies...* *Guitar Playing For Dummies...* etc. The "Dummies" books were written to give readers non-intimidating guides to various topics. Included among them are:

- *The Bible for Dummies*
- *Christianity For Dummies*
- *The Historical Jesus For Dummies*

Neither Jesus nor the Canaanite woman seem to have read them.



Christianity isn't for dummies, you see. Being a follower of Jesus, and so calling upon Him for help, can't be made easy and non-intimidating. Face it: Jesus is intimidating! At least, the Jesus presented to us in the Gospels is intimidating. Now, it's easy to create your own idea and image of Jesus. Just take a couple of stories from the Bible – such as His refusing to agree to stone a woman caught in the act of adultery, but telling her accusers that whoever is without sin should throw the first stone; or, His praying, **“Father, forgive them,”** as He was being crucified – and from them you can create a Jesus who would never accuse anyone; never reject anyone; never demand that you turn away from your behavior and change. That's the Jesus who is popular, whom people like: the loving Jesus who accepts everyone and everything. Jesus for dummies.

That's not the real Jesus, however. The real Jesus is intimidating. As we see with this interaction with the Canaanite woman, He can ignore you. He can seem to not care about your troubles and want nothing to do with you. *“But, He did help the woman! He did care!”* Yes, He did. But, why? What prompted Him to listen to her and give her the help she wanted? See this, and you will not be a dummy. Your faith will not be in a contrived Savior, a fake image. It will not be weak and fail.

“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” It is faith that gets His ear and receives His help. But, what is faith: the faith that saves; the faith to which Jesus responds?

Such faith is not simply believing there is a higher power. That kind of faith does not get your cry to God's ear any more than dialing just any numbers on your phone gets you an ambulance. The woman cries to Jesus, **“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!”** She names Him. The God who is true, who can overcome for you the demonic and all the powers of hell as they threaten you with sickness and death and your unworthiness because of your sins, is the God who became man. Living in this fallen world, He experienced the sorrows and pains that life brings, and so is not far from you when you are in them. **“Jesus knows our every weakness,”** the hymn rightly says. He experienced them Himself. The Canaanite woman went to Jesus, a man who had come near to where she lived, and addressed Him as Lord. God had come to her, so she could go to Him with her need!

And when He isn't listening? When He doesn't answer, not even when those close to Him are also crying out to Him for you? Don't give up! Continue crying out for help! Hold onto the promises of His Word, such as Ps. 28:8, our Introit: **“The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.”** God anointed you, united you to Jesus and poured our His Holy Spirit upon you in the anointing of your Baptism. He is your faithful Father who will not go back on His promises. Hold Him to them! Great faith is persistent faith, as we see with this woman.

But, ultimately, the faith that Jesus praises as great is the faith that accepts His judgment of you yet still believes that He will help you. The woman had addressed Jesus with a Jewish title – Son of David, the Messiah promised to the Jews. And so,

when Jesus did respond, He said, ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”*** Dogs: that is what Jews derisively called the Gentiles. But, there He was, outside of Israel’s borders, in the district of Tyre and Sidon. Gentile territory. Her territory. He had come to her! So, she accepted what He said about her. She was a Gentile dog. ***“Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”*** He, the Master of all, had come to her. She had a right to His help. Jesus agreed, and gave her His help.

Your Lord says you are a sinner. He knows your sins, even better than you do. ***“God has consigned all to disobedience,”*** Holy Scripture says (Rom. 11:32). You have no more right to His help than anyone else, even the worst of unbelievers. But, in love and mercy He sent His Son to sinners. The Son became flesh and gave His life for us on the cross. In Jesus we see that God has come to sinners. He has had mercy on us all... on you. Your Jesus will respond to you when you cry out to Him in faith.

Take it to the Lord in prayer, then: whatever your need! Whatever your sorrow! He knows your every weakness, and you will find Him to be your faithful Friend.

Blessed be the Lord! In Jesus He hears the voice of our pleas for mercy. Blessed be His holy name forever! Amen.