

“The Great Thing about Little Dogs” (Matthew 15:21-28)

For Your Life in Christ the 9th Sunday after Pentecost

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Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Introduction: No matter how you cut it, this morning’s Gospel is very challenging: There is a woman in desperate need, and there is no question that she has true faith in the Lord (she calls Jesus “Lord” three times), and she is truly an example of faith, love, and humility, and yet this is a rough summary of what happened:

- A. It appears that Jesus completely ignored her first request. She came crying out, **“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”** (22) And then Scripture records, **“But he did not answer her a word.”** (23)
- B. Then after Jesus’ disciples seemed to have insinuated that the Lord should just help her out and send her on her way, Jesus essentially said that he had not come for this woman (23-24). Jesus answered, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** (24) You see the woman who was begging him was a Cannanite, a race that in the Old Testament Israel was commanded by God to exterminate because of their idol worship (Dt 20:17). The point is that the woman was *seemingly* rejected a second time!
- C. The Scriptures record what happened next: **“But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’”** (25) And it was to this that Jesus after seemingly ignoring her and then seemingly avoiding her, finally actually speaks *to* her, but notice what he: **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”** Wow! First, the woman is seemingly ignored; then, the woman is seemingly actively avoided; and then, Jesus called her a dog!

Part I: How Would You Have Reacted?

- A. I will never forget the story of what happened with my dad (of blessed memory) when my parent’s first baby – my big brother who I never met – was only three days old and

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because of the extreme heat and his difficulty breathing, died as an infant. My parents were very young and devastated of course. My dad went out walking and went to find the local pastor. He found the pastor and told the pastor what had happened and asked the pastor if he would conduct the funeral for his baby boy. To which the pastor responded that he couldn’t because he was essentially too busy. Needless to say, that didn’t go over too well with my dad. He had recently been honorably discharged from the U.S. Marines after fighting for our country in World War II. When the pastor said this, my dad basically used some colorful language to tell the pastor what he could do. As my dad walked away, the pastor realized the seriousness of what had just transpired, and he literally went running after my dad.

- B. This true story has made a deep impression on me. People need their pastor’s to be there for them. I am humbled by my limitations, but I pray that I will always be able to serve my people faithfully. If I do not respond to the real needs of my people, not only would I hurt them, but I could hurt their faith in the Lord. But what happens when it seems that THE PASTOR, the Shepherd of our souls, the true God, the Lord Himself is the One who does not answer us? There are times when God is silent, and there are times when we feel that we are being ignored. And it hurts and it can hurt so much that we are tempted to tell God what he can do as we walk away in anger and confusion. Does this ever happen? It happens more often than we think.

II. But Faith Looks Past Appearances:

- A. But this Gospel is given to us this morning dear Christians so that we would learn from the Canaanite woman. She did not give up on God even though many people would reason that she should have. That’s the problem with us, we don’t want to live by faith, we want God to do exactly what *we* think is right when and where we say and we prove ourselves to be sinners, because we are always putting ourselves first.

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- B. This woman in our Gospel, however, brings out the truth about God. It has been said about this account from Matthew 15 that it really wasn't the woman who was looking for Jesus, but it was – all along – Jesus who was looking for the woman.
- C. What we take as ignoring her, Luther has a different take:
“Look how Christ drives her faith deep into her heart that it becomes strong and firm.”
- D. Epiphanius the Latin wrote,
“It was not that the Lord was unwilling to heal her but that he might reveal her great faith and humility.”
- E. The fact of the matter is that while Jesus was being faithful to God in His mission to serve first ***“the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6 & 15:26)***, He would in His time and in His way also do what was best for the Gentile woman.
- F. In other words, while being obedient to the Heavenly Father, Jesus was not trying to be cruel towards the woman. It had to be clear in the hearing of the apostles, that Jesus was obedient to the plan of God.
- G. Having said that, it is also true that Jesus was actively pouring out mercy to the woman. Again Luther says,
“There is more ‘yes’ in this than ‘no’; ‘yes’, pure ‘yes’ is in it, but indeed deep and secretly, and it only appears as a pure ‘no.’”
- H. Jesus knew exactly what was going on thanks to what we know about the great thing about little dogs.

Conclusion: Little Dogs:

- A. Jesus gave His mercy towards the woman away when He said, ***“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” (26)***
 - B. In the Orient, dogs had no owners but ran wild and acted as scavengers for garbage. These were completely unclean to the Jews and Jews viewed Gentiles like these wild dogs.
 - C. This term Jesus did NOT use. He did NOT call the woman a wild dog, but used a term of endearment for a little dog, or a household dog that is loved, cared for, and provided for.
 - D. Why even go here? Because He had to put the CHILDREN of Israel first, ***but He made a way to help the woman too!***
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- E. I am personally greatly helped by the word Jesus used as I think of our little dog (pug) Henry. As his name means, “house-ruler”. He is our pet, but the dog has it made-in-the-shade. For one thing, he gets to enjoy our house more than I do even though I pay the bills, and needless to say, Henry knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will always get food from us. He lives very well to say the least!
 - F. Jesus gave this woman an “in,” and boy did she capitalize:
Matthew 15:27: *“She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’”*
 - G. At this Jesus was trapped by His own words (and see His response, v 28)! The woman grabbed hold of His WORD! Jesus was caught but as Luther said, “He loves to be caught this way!”
 - H. Think of Jacob in Genesis 32 who would not let God go!
 - I. Think of the Roman Centurion in Matthew 8 who said, “...but only say the word” (v8)!
 - J. And think of yourself: to you Christ says “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mt 9:13)”, to you the Word says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15)”, so that you can say, ***“I confess, I am only a sinner, only a little dog, but you came for me, you came for ME!”***
 - K. In Psalm 22 the prophecy of the torment of the cross of Jesus Christ is revealed. The Lord said, ***“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircle me (v 16).”*** But even for these Jesus prayed, even for these wild and ruthless dogs He shed His blood ***“while we were enemies we were reconciled to God (Rm 5:10).”***
 - L. There is power in the humble prayer because it depends wholly on Christ, nothing else, and no one else. And the crumbs that fall on you are life, eternal life, and the little dog is made into a child of God.