

## **12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost August 20 2023**

### **Psalm 67; Matthew 15:21-28**

Do you love your children? Would you do anything for them and their health? Then you get the Canaanite woman this morning.

Jesus and his disciples are in the district of Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile region. Gentiles were any people who were not Jews. Who were not among the descendants of Abraham. They were, by definition, unrighteous, and to be avoided because of that.

Jesus and the disciples are approached by a Canaanite woman. She has at least two strikes against her. She is not only a woman- a class that had few, if any, rights. Who were, if not property, at least under the dominion of a male. Basically, nonentities. And she was a Canaanite, a descendant from the ancient enemies of Israel (think Goliath from the Hebrew Scriptures), those who worshipped other gods and ate forbidden foods. Someone to have nothing to do with. Despite this, for love of her daughter, she comes to Jesus.

She approaches and does two things that the disciples themselves were doing last week. The first is that she is crying out, an almost inarticulate shout- just like the disciples in the boat did when they saw Jesus. But instead of the cry being in

fear of Jesus believing he was a ghost, she calls him Lord, Son of David and asks for Jesus' mercy on her daughter who is tormented by a demon. Jesus does not take up the conversation. The disciples are annoyed by this noisy, insistent presence. A Canaanite woman, just making a scene. So, they ask Jesus to send her away. But while Jesus seems to agree he is not called to anyone but the House of Israel (Jews) he does not speak to the woman or send her away.

Then the woman does the second thing the disciples did last week. She came and knelt before Jesus. The word used is what the disciples did when Jesus got into the boat with Peter. They worshipped him. This Canaanite woman is worshipping Jesus. And she uses almost the same words as Peter. "Lord, rescue me!" Health for her daughter will rescue her from worry and despair.

Jesus hears her, but seems to speak past her. "You don't take your children's food and throw it to the dogs." Without hesitation she responds, sure... but even dogs get crumbs from the table. Even a little of what you offer will be enough she seems to say. Where have we heard that before?

Jesus then finally takes up the conversation and answers the woman directly. Woman, great is your faith! This is in contrast

to Peter from last week who only had a little faith. Here, this outsider, this Canaanite woman harassing Jesus to help her daughter is told her faith is great and that her daughter has been healed. Is no longer demonized. She is rescued by Jesus.

Apparently, God's mercy, love, and justice are for those outside the house of Israel. Apparently, it isn't a special thing for a select few alone, but for everyone. Yet, this idea is not unique to Jesus. Look at our Psalm today, as one commentator put it the psalm, "expands the boundaries of God's embrace to include people who were vilified as enemies and outsiders... The ancient poet comes from a geo-politically insignificant tribe, yet he prays for God's blessings to fall on "all nations." God is not a territorial god, the author says; God is the lord of all nations and all peoples. God welcomes "all the ends of the earth" to offer praise and thanks." Even Canaanite women.

Every time people try to bound the love of God in Jesus Christ, to limit who it is for, or how you can access it. Every time we try and say, it isn't for these people because they did not earn it, they aren't good enough for it, they are too great a sinner. Jesus just smiles and extends his arms towards them.

Especially the children. Peter and the other disciples try and keep these messy, noisy, rambunctious tykes away from Jesus. They

spoil the mood and are not meant to be this close to important things. But Jesus says, let them come. Jesus does not bound his mercy and heals the demonized daughter of this Canaanite woman. Setting an example for us, his followers. No one's child is beyond our care and attention. For any reason.

Who is our child? Is it just the one with our blood running through their veins who, like the Canaanite woman, we would do anything to heal? Is it just the one we chose to welcome into our home through fostering or adoption? Is it just the ones who are within the community of this assembly? Is the love of God in Jesus Christ bounded by such thoughts.

This text clearly says no. Our children are not just those of our blood, but all those around us. Especially those in need. Those tormented by demons.

I am mindful of parents sending children back to school this week. Mindful that those children will be going through active shooter drills. Something that was inconceivable when I grew up. This ought not be so.

Children who need mental health services and cannot get access to them. While there have been legislative measures passed,

those have not translated into better, quicker access for those in need. This ought not be so.

There are children tormented by hunger. Our College Community School District runs not only a food pantry and food boxes that are regularly used by students and their families, but also assists families in getting help with rent, utilities, and housing. This ought not to be so.

These children are not the whelps of those who do not deserve our help because they have made bad decisions, are lazy, from the wrong side of the tracks, or the wrong country. These are our kids, human beings created in the image of God whom Jesus himself calls us to serve.

No one lies outside the bounds of God's love, mercy, and grace come to us in Jesus Christ. Just because Jesus shows mercy to this child, does not mean there is less mercy for another. Just because we help feed this hungry child does not mean there is less for our own blood. It just means there is one less distraught mother. One less hungry child. They are rescued. And our human community is better for it.

This season after Pentecost we have been exploring what the reign of heaven looks like and how we as the Body of Christ in

the world help model that for others. The reign of God is one that is open to all. There are no undeserving people. For we all are in need of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Whether we have been raised in the faith or just brushed up against it yesterday.

As we pray for all students who are returning to school, as we pray for the educators, staff, coaches, officials, bus drivers, and others who will attend to their education, as we pray for their parents. Let us also pray for ourselves.

That we would have the same trust in Jesus' mercy and grace for us and for our children. That we would have the same persistence as this Canaanite sibling in faith to pursue healing for our children who are tormented by demons of violence, mental illness, hunger, war, disease. That we would be more like Jesus in how we respond to those in need. To bring healing and wholeness.

That we would be gathered with all the nations on God's holy mountain, to shout joyful songs of praise and thanksgiving that we have seen God's justice, experienced God's mercy, and have been sent to show it to all peoples and nations.

Thanks be to God.