

Rev. Danny Mackey
Lent 2 (Reminiscere)
Matthew 15:21-28
March 17, 2019
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

She was not of Israel. She had not the adoption as sons. She did not have the divine glory: the covenants, the Law, the temple worship, the promises. She was not of the Patriarchs. She was not of God's chosen people.

Rather, she was of the Gentiles. Because, as we have heard, the Lord "withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon"—regions of the Gentiles—and "a Canaanite woman from that region came out" to Him.

With great earnestness, she begged Him, crying out, for Him to have mercy upon her. She was desperate to heal her daughter who was "severely oppressed by a demon."

How pitiable is she! What a sad spectacle to see her in such sorrow! A mother, imploring for her daughter—a daughter plagued by such evil. An evil so repulsive the woman dared not bring her daughter out in public. She dared not ask Christ to see her daughter either! She merely pleaded: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!" Just as we are tormented by a loved one's sufferings, this mother suffered, victim to the same demon.

Christ... Christ answered not a word. As if He hadn't heard.

Israel Christ courts and woos as an adulterous wife. Israel is immoral; He strives to win her back. Israel blasphemes; He pleads with her. Israel tests Him; He does not dismiss her.

This Canaanite woman... This Canaanite woman came running to Him, entreating Him, beseeching Him. She knew neither the Law nor the Prophets. Yet she came with great reverence. Christ answered not a word.

Christ had gone to the villages, healing the sick. Surely, she heard report of His great compassion. He had done for others. She came to Him instead of Him coming to her. Christ utterly repelled her; Christ answered not a word.

How could our Lord not be moved by her pleas? She came humble, unworthy, begging. Indeed, was moved to compassion. Why then did our Lord rebuff her so? He desired to enkindle her desire and to lay her low, ensuring her humility before Him.

The sight is so disturbing the disciples are overwhelmed by it. Troubled in their hearts. They do not join her plea, saying "Grant her this favor." Instead, they urged the Christ:

“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” Maybe they said the opposite of what they wanted in order to persuade Him. Maybe they were fearful of His rejection. Maybe they were simply annoyed. Regardless, Christ answered them a word: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

This begs the question. If Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, how did we come from among the Gentiles into Christ’s fold?

Christ, the great Teacher, taught His disciples. This Canaanite woman is His object lesson. A lesson in which we can rejoice, because it concerns us and our salvation.

Abraham had been promised: “And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gn 22:18). This blessing came from Israel, thus it behooved God to manifest His bodily presence, His birth, His miracles, and His glorious resurrection among that very people. So had God ordained; so He had set forth from the world’s foundation, so predicted, so fulfilled. Christ was to come to Israel—to be seen, betrayed, and slain, to gain from her number those He had predestined.

Not all of Israel was unfaithful and proud. Christ was separating the weed from the wheat. A great quantity of chaff was among Israel, but also a hidden worth of grain. Among Israel was that which was to be burnt; among her also was that which would fill the barn. From this seed came St. Peter and the all the other apostles.

To Peter and the other apostles—to those from among Israel—Christ had come. They witnessed His incarnation, His passion, His death, His resurrection. Only Israel—only those lost sheep—beheld His glory. It was to Israel that Peter preached Christ on Pentecost Day. Christ was crucified and killed by lawless Israel (Ac 2:23).

And as Israel cried out to Peter—understanding that they were guilty of Christ’s blood—Peter spoke wisdom, counsel to her salvation: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Ac 2:38).

If the crime of killing Christ was forgiven to those guilty of it, how can we doubt that Christ would forgive us?

As those frenzied men crucified our Lord—as the patients took up arms and slew their Physician, killing Him—they were ignorant that they were preparing a medicine for themselves—and for all the world! By the Christ so put to death all are cured. By His blood and righteousness all are redeemed. By the bread of His body all are delivered from famine.

Christ was sent to Israel, that He might reveal salvation in His body to her. And in Israel's disobedience, all receive God's irrevocable gift and call: "Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all" (Rm 11:30-32).

Christ was sent to the lost sheep of Israel not to ignore the sheep He foreknew among the Gentiles. Rather, so that the Gentiles like this Canaanite woman might also be saved. As Isaiah prophesies: "[God's] house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Is 56:7,8). Christ is gathering still other sheep besides those already gathered.

Of these other sheep was the Canaanite woman. She was not rejected by Christ, merely put off. "I was sent," said Christ, "only to the lost sheep of Israel." She was instant in her cries. She persevered—asking, seeking His mercy. She drew nearer, continuing her supplications, falling before Him, and worshipping Him. "Lord, help me!" she cried.

Christ... Christ finally answered her a word: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." "You are a dog. You are Gentile. You worship idols. What's proper for the dogs but to dig through the garbage!"

Like a dog, she might have been tempted to turn away, tail between her legs, slinking as she had come: a dog, a mongrel dog. She persevered in her asking. From Christ's reproach, we see her humility manifested. And in humility she obtained mercy. She did not become incensed. She did not get offended because she was called a dog.

She begged and simply said, "Yes, Lord." "You have called me a dog, and truly a dog I am. As You, Lord, have said. Yet I ought not be refused this blessing because I am a dog. Truly, 'even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' I entreat a small blessing; a moderate blessing I desire. I do not press to the table. I only ask for crumbs."

Brothers and sisters, Christ has answered you a word. He gives you this Canaanite woman to teach you.

Christ called her a dog. She did not say, "I am not," but she said, "I am." She acknowledged her filth and so was able to receive the blessing. Christ immediately responded: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."

Israel was puffed up in her pride, because she had been given the Law, the Patriarchs, the Prophets. Israel had Moses, the exodus through the Red Sea, the rescue from Pharaoh and his armies. Israel was raised to glory under David, splendor under Solomon. Israel was unwilling to humble herself to Christ, the author of humility.

True humility flows from Christ, He who humbled Himself completely. In Christ, God humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin, was made man, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, and was buried. In Christ, God died for us men and for our salvation so that man might acknowledge himself to be mere man. So that man might acknowledge himself to be frail, to see his sin and filth. Humility acknowledges such a pitiable condition.

Pride prevented Israel from coming to Christ. Thus, Isaiah tells us, the natural branches are broken off the olive tree. In other words, Israel was broken from Jesse's Root because of her pride; and the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted in. As St. Paul writes, "Some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root" (Rm 11:17). Because of pride, Israel was broken off. Because of humility, the wild olive tree was grafted in.

The Canaanite woman acknowledged her condition and so had no room for pride. "Yes, Lord," "I am a dog. I ask only for crumbs."

The more humble we are, the more vast are our hearts, and the more full God can make them. For the hills drive back water, but the valleys are filled by it. How full Christ made the Canaanite woman's heart, her daughter being healed instantly!

It is in humility that we are grafted to the tree, of which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are the root. Let us then learn, or let us hold fast, humility. If we do not have it yet, let us learn it. If we have it, let us not lose it. If we do not have it yet, let us have it, that we may be grafted in. If we have it already, let us hold it fast, that we may not be cut off.

Like the Canaanite woman, we are as dogs in our sin, begging for the crumbs from our Master's table. Despite our sin, we have been grafted to the Root of Jesse. We can be confident when we pray. In the Kyrie, Christ has taught us to plead: "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy." Having thus been taught to cry out, we know that Christ will indeed answer us a word.

In Jesus' name.