

# The Second Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2021  
Matthew 15:21-28

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In the Gospel today, we see Jesus not as we are accustomed to. The Canaanite woman approaches Jesus and His disciples with a prayer – a plea, ***“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”*** The Gospel says, ***“He answered her not a word.”***

This is not the Jesus we know and love. Maybe in the back of your mind, you are wondering about this Jesus, *“Who are you?”*

While I was on vicarage, there was a lady that lived in a nursing home; one day she requested from the pastor a picture of Jesus to hang on her wall. My supervisor brought her an image of Jesus, one of the Olan Mills style portraits. But it was not right, she informed us. She did not want a feminine-looking Jesus, but a strong Jesus, a Savior – that’s what she was looking for.

This got me thinking – there is an image of Jesus near the church office, it’s no Olan Mills, but the countenance of Jesus’ face rubs some people the wrong way. His face displays a look of seriousness – a countenance that contradicts the Gospel we heard last week at the Baptism (of Luke Eckardt) as Jesus tells His disciples, ***“Let the little children come unto me.”*** However, I kind of like the painting in the hallway and wonder if the artist had this Gospel in mind as he painted the icon.

Isn’t it interesting how the true subjectiveness of art influences not only how we see the world, but how we also want Jesus to appear to our eyes and within our own hearts? What Jesus do you want? The masculine Jesus? A serious Jesus? Or a happy Jesus? Well, the Canaanite woman doesn’t get a choice and neither do you.

Now, three times this woman pleads with Jesus for His mercy, it appears He will be immovable. Her crying must have been something because even the disciples felt for her and turned to Jesus in order to intercede on her behalf. At first glance, you may very well say, the disciples don’t appear to be that kind, but I believe their concern is genuine and lost in translation as Jesus responds to them with, ***“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*** He is saying, I was not sent for this Canaanite – this woman who is from the ancient and idolatrous enemies of God’s people, rather, I was sent to redeem Israel.

None of this matters to the woman, though. She will not relent or be dismissed. She has heard of Jesus and the miracles He has already done – possibly the healing of the

paralytic, the raising of the ruler's daughter, the restoration of sight for the blind, the loosening of the mute man's tongue, and the feeding of the five thousand – where even the crumbs were all gathered into baskets after everyone ate. All that Jesus has done proceeds Him and this is enough for her here and she places her faith in Him to give her and her daughter healing and mercy. But, *"He answered her not a word."*

The whole Gospel is a bit awkward for us to hear, isn't it? The Psalmist writes, *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy."* (Psalm 103:8) But, where is His mercy? Where is His graciousness in saying, *"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."* As if the situation couldn't get worse, He insinuates she's a little dog.

Throughout time, the God of Israel has been feeding His ungrateful people in the wilderness of the exodus and again in the recent feeding of the five thousand. In saying, *"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs"* – Jesus will learn whether this woman really knows who He is or is she just giving Him lip service as she addressed Him saying, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!"*

Ultimately, in the final conversation, she will confess the purity of her faith to Jesus and her unworthiness by saying, *"Even [the little dogs even] the puppies eat from the crumbs that fall from tables of their masters."* (Jerome) If you have children, you know how the endless train of crumbs of food fall from the table to the floor below. This space becomes a utopia for dogs to dine and feast.

The woman doesn't want to take anything away from the lost sheep of Israel. She understands that Jesus came to redeem His sheep that have wandered, but she also believes in the abundance of God's mercy - that even the crumbs will suffice for her and her daughter to live on.

Are you as persistent and bold as this Canaanite today in your pleas for mercy and your desire for God's help? Would you also be satisfied with crumbs?

Ultimately, none of us pray as we ought and our faith is often found wavering throughout this life. When God does not appear to give you an answer to your prayer, you become disheartened and possibly venture off to look for another Jesus, one that fits your needs.

Maybe you have prayed that Jesus would remove a cross from your life – a broken relationship, an ailment that could lead to death, but at the end of the day you find yourself still not speaking with your spouse while your brother's cancer remains. You wanted a strong Jesus, one that would fix these hardships or take them away.

Maybe you prayed for a miracle, that the child in the womb that you were told would die even before breathing the air would in reality survive and live, but that also didn't happen. You wanted the merciful and life-giving Jesus. All of these things are good things to pray for and if we learn one thing from the Canaanite woman – don't stop praying, rather approach God in persistent prayer and faith.

Learn to pray as she did, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!"* In these pleas, she reveals Jesus as the object of her faith and she was not swayed by his demeanor.

There's something else she confesses with this statement *"Son of David,"* - that Jesus is both God and man. We often come to the belief that prayers are to be answered just as letters were once returned in the old days and emails are supposed to be responded to today.

Likewise, we have a certain belief regarding the demeanor of Jesus and often prefer a smiling and welcoming Jesus – one to accompany our Precious Moments collection of angels. But, Jesus was *"born of the Virgin Mary and made man."* He grew not only in age, but also in wisdom. When the temple became a place of commerce, Jesus cleansed it by driving the merchants out with a whip. When He gathered the children unto him, He did so with joy. When His friend Lazarus died, He wept. When you look at the crucifix above the altar, what do you see? I see the face of a Savior who experienced an agonizing and painful death not only to redeem the Israel of the Old Testament, but to save this Canaanite who descends from the ancient and adulterous enemies of God, **I see a man** who enter the judgement hall to redeem you.

Luther wrote regarding today's text, *"This was written for all our comfort and instruction, so that we may know how deeply God hides His grace from us, so that we would not consider Him according to our perception and thinking but strictly according to His Word."*<sup>1</sup>

We often approach prayer as a means to receive an immediate response from God. But God's grace can be hidden from our perceptions – and when we experience this, we see Jesus as uninterested. His demeanor appears as cold and His countenance is not as we desire. But, this is not so, for in these ways we are taught to rely all the more upon God's Word. It is not subject to our feelings, emotions, or perceptions – it is unchanging and it is good.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (2013). [Gospel for the Second Sunday in Lent](#). In B. T. G. Mayes, J. L. Langebartels, & C. B. Brown (Eds.), *Luther's Works: Church Postil II* (Vol. 76, p. 380). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

This Lent, do not waver in your prayers, nor be dismayed if God's grace appears hidden from you, remain persistent. The voice of the Canaanite woman did not waver, rather her voice remained persistently focused on the object of her faith – her Lord and the Son of David. His response to her, *“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”* In this way, we are taught that prayer is the voice of faith.

So join her now in singing and echoing a similar prayer in the Agnus Dei before you approach the altar, *“Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.”* Give voice to your faith and know that even in the crumbs of bread and wine, your Lord sees your faith and has mercy upon you – He gives you His forgiveness and His life. He gives you His Word. +INJ+

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

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