

Sermon for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Romans 11: 1-2a; 29-32; Matthew 15: 10-28

Our Savior's Lutheran Church. August 16, 2020

Dear friends in Christ, grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Let us pray: God, your word is the source of comfort we turn to when we need the reassurance of your love. When what you have to say leaves us with more questions than answers, help us to know that even in the 'questions,' your love for us is 'still there.' In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well good morning everyone, it is good to be with you today! I hope the week has been good to all of you, even if we 'are' still walking through some difficult times together. It's important to 'continue to do' the things we need to take care of ourselves, and those around us, the best we can, not just during this time of pandemic, but through all of life's ups and downs, I hope all of you are doing just that.

Sometimes, it helps to have a little 'extra love and support' during difficult times, and what better place to find it than 'right here' in

worship together, where we gather around **'God's word,'** and hear the stories of 'faith' that remind us that **God always hears us when we call.**

Yes, God's word often 'is' a place of comfort to me when life gets a bit out of control, I hope it is to you too. I love to read these 'stories of faith' that remind me that I am not alone in my walk of faith.

God's people have **'called out to God'** in their time of need throughout both the Old and New Testament, and each time I read these stories I am reminded of the **'ever-present love of God'** that is my source of **'healing' and 'strength.'** I suppose that is why stories like the one we just heard in Matthew's gospel, can seem somewhat 'strange' to us, for it sounds as if they 'contradict' the 'comforting words of Jesus' we find elsewhere in the Gospels. Stories like this one today, require a little more **'thought'** when we read and hear them, and when we seek to find **'comfort'** in their 'meaning.' So let's give it a little more thought together today.

It's one of those stories that take us in many directions really. I woke up about three o'clock in the morning the other night thinking about it for quite some time, wondering about what it would have to say to us today. The one part of it that kept me awake that night was

this interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman; her ‘cries’ to Jesus to heal her daughter, and Jesus’ ‘response,’ first ‘silence,’ and then, a ‘terrible insult.’

I found no ‘comfort’ from this story as I lay in bed staring at the ceiling that night, and yet, there was something, ‘something in this story’ that I ‘needed to hear,’ that ‘we’ need to hear today. (Pause)

“And 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 cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon, but he did not answer her a word.”

His disciples begged him, “Send her away, for she is crying 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 fair 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 master’s table.”

When we read the stories from the gospels, and we hear the words of Jesus, we are used to hearing about God's 'love,' God's 'mercy,' and God's 'Grace,' and how it is there for **everyone.** Many times in the gospels Jesus 'stands' with the 'outcasts,' those deemed as 'unworthy' of God's love and favor by those around him who considered 'themselves,' as **God's children.** We know and we 'love' this 'compassionate,' 'caring,' 'loving' image of Jesus, and then we read a gospel story like this one today.

How can this be the same person? How can these words to the woman today come from the mouth of **'our Jesus' the one 'we know and love?'** Worse yet, what if these words of Jesus 'don't' surprise us at all? **What if 'we too' are just as 'silent,' when the cries of the 'outsiders' fall upon our ears too?**

Sometimes, it not just the 'illness' or the 'injustice' or the 'sorrows' of this life that cause us our greatest pain, it's the **'silent response'** we receive as we 'cry out for help' to those around us.

The woman's cries to 'help her daughter' are 'ignored' by the people around her, 'God's people,' and now it seems even 'God's own Son' ignores her cries.

She persists! The disciples want her to just go away. **“Send her away Jesus, for she is crying after us,”** and he agrees, they ‘didn’t’ need to listen to her. **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** Jesus responds.

But she persisted! Can you see how ‘important’ it is for us to hear this story again today? Those who are met with silence, even if they are met with the ‘silence of God,’ are **‘persistent’ in their cries, they must be! They ‘must’ be heard!**

“Lord, help me!” and Jesus answered her, **“It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs!”** “It was not fair to take the blessings meant for the children of the **house of Israel,** and give it to the **Gentiles, the ‘outsiders!’**

The things we see happening in ‘our world today’ happened back then too. Looking down on people different than ourselves is a sin that has plagued human kind since the beginning of time. We ‘judge’ people who are a different ‘color’ than us, or a different ‘religion’ than us, or a different ‘political party’ than us, or those who ‘think’ different than us, more often than not. Sometimes we do so with just our ‘silence.’

Knowing the human condition, what we 'all are capable of doing, and the 'sin' that all of us carry in our own lives, I suppose it doesn't come as much of a surprise to us.

But what happens when 'Jesus' acts this way...**what sense can we make of this story today, of Jesus' silence, and of his harsh words in response to the woman's cries?**

Biblical scholars have speculated through the years that Jesus was just being 'sneaky' with his words today, trying to 'convict' the disciples of 'their sins' against the Gentiles by 'pretending' to be as prejudice as they were...**but what if he really meant what he said to the woman today?**

Scripture says that Jesus became just as human as you and me. He was born of a woman, flesh and blood, same as you and me.

He felt the same 'emotions,' felt both the same 'sorrow' and 'joy,' 'anger' and 'compassion' as you and me. **What if Jesus also wrestled with 'right and wrong in his own life,' just like you and me?**

He disobeyed his folks when he was a young boy and got lost and left behind in a temple for awhile. Boy did he catch heck from his mom for that one!

He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. He stood up to the devil and 'won,' but he was 'tempted' it says.

He blew his top and chased the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip one time, kind of forgot to 'turn the other cheek' there!

It seems, from the stories of scripture, that Jesus 'understood' what it's like to be as human as you and me, **and perhaps that meant that Jesus, like us, wasn't always at his best when it came to dealing with the people around him.** Maybe he too, needed God's nudge from time-to-time, to remind him of 'who he was,' and 'what he had come to do,' maybe that nudge came from this 'Canaanite woman' today.

"It is not fair 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 master's 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.

Maybe Jesus 'was' just teaching a lesson.

But maybe the lesson was that **even 'God knows' what it feels like, to 'know' when we are wrong!** Maybe God became 'so much like us,' so that God would '**understand**' when we '**just don't get it,**' when we 'respond' to the cries of this world with 'silence,' when our 'words' create walls of 'hurt' and 'anger' instead of bringing 'comfort' and 'healing.' Maybe God became 'so human' that '**God would understand' the guilt we feel when we aren't who we were created to be.**

Maybe the lesson for us today is in those words of '**repentance**' and '**love,**' of '**Jesus to the woman he first ignored.**

"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you wish, and her daughter was healed instantly."

God's love, that lived in Jesus too, was for her, and Jesus 'gave that love to her,' how can we not do the same to those who cry out to us!

Just as Jesus 'understands' what it's like to be as human as us, it's time for us to understand that the Spirit that lived in him, is the same Spirit of God that lives in us, and that Spirit of God's love, is the healing this world needs from us now! **How can we not give that love away?**

Amen.

