

Bold to Hope, Blessed to Receive!

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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Season after Pentecost: Year A: Matthew 15:21-28

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

The Canaanite woman sees and hopes in the new kingdom Jesus is already fulfilling. She is bold to ask for what she believes God will deliver to the Canaanites as well as the Jews. We Christians are called to live in this kind of bold hope each and every day! Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we believe that something else is happening beyond our sight. God's Kingdom is breaking in upon us, now!

God's grace, peace and wisdom be with you and come upon you this day. Amen.

Can you and I think of a time when we begged God for something? When we came boldly with a request of God that we wouldn't let go of, until it had been granted? Was it for a relationship? A job? An illness? Can we go back momentarily to that time and those feelings inside?

That question makes me think of people of color who have come into the streets of our country for weeks upon weeks, asking for radical and lasting change. The kind of change that would bring them new hope and new life!

This Canannite woman is asking for the very same thing. She is a mother first. Her daughter is very ill. She is desperate for help. The only problem is her racial background. She comes from a land some way north of Israel. She is not a Jew. She comes from a territory where gods and religious festivals were related to the land, farming and fertility rites.

The disciples hear her cries for help. She's loud. She's acting out and disgracing herself as a woman. Plus.....she's from the wrong race. The disciples don't like it or her.

"Jesus," they speak to their rabbi with some insistency, "Tell her to go away!"

Instead of answering the disciples, or the woman, Jesus re-states His mission. “I came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In other words, my mission from God has nothing to do with her. Or does it?

The woman comes and assumes a posture on her knees. This is a posture which people take in front of Jesus when they recognize who He is. She addresses the Lord, as the Son of David, the Messiah, a title the disciples are only beginning to understand. Who is this lady?

What happens next often takes us by surprise. Jesus throws her a racial slur! He calls her a ‘dog.’ Calling a Gentile – a non-Jew – a dog was a regular way of indicating gentiles as inferior to Jews. Think about ethnic slurs we might hear today. Jesus actually calls her a little puppy, but still it’s a dog.

Here is where she throws Jesus a curve ball. She says, “Yes, Jesus, I am a little puppy, a dog. I am a Gentile. But I still deserve what you have to offer me, even if it is only crumbs. Because that is your real mission. You are coming for the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike.”

Talk about saavy! Talk about bold! Talk about not backing down! Talk about hope.

Jesus commends the Canaanite woman’s faith because she understands His mission...at this point perhaps better than He does! Jesus is standing at the crossroad of Jew and Gentile and she is already standing at the empty tomb on Easter morning! The empty tomb meant a destruction of labels; sin and death, Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, slave and free, women and men; now all one in God.

Jesus had declared He came only for the lost sheep of Israel. (Remember Israel in this context, is the people of Israel, God’s chosen people of the Old Testament, not the Nation/State of Israel of 2020.) Yet, somehow this desperate mother understands who is the Son of God. She knows that eventually God’s new realm and kingdom will be for all people and she is one of those people. “Yes, I’m a dog, and I deserve some of your crumbs!”

Jesus embodies the fulfillment of God’s covenant to Israel, and it is already breaking in while He walks the earth. His life and ministry were already bringing in a new kingdom: miracles, healings, feeding of the 5000, walking on water...all served as signs to His being the Son of God. The disciples were in the middle of it all. They were only beginning to understand. Not her!

God uses this Canaanite woman, to wake Jesus up: to remind Him, perhaps of His larger mission, to call Jesus back to the bigger picture.

“Woman! Great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. Let your daughter be healed instantly.” She was bold to hope and blessed to receive.

I’ve shared this joke before, but it fits.

The public teacher walked around her room looking at the pictures she had assigned her students to draw. She got to little Jane's desk. "Jane, I don't recognize what you're trying to draw. What is this?"

"It's a picture of God."

"Really? No one has ever seen God. No one knows what God looks like."

"Well, they will in just a minute!"

Little Jane reminds us of the Canaanite woman. Bold, sassy, confident, believing! The whole vision is there already, God simply calls us to see it and believe it and walk straight into it! The Canaanite woman's faith is the kind of hope we Christians are called to live into each day!

We are living in anxious days. Pandemic. Rising Covid cases and deaths. Questions about safety of schools and colleges opening. Race conversations. Yet we too can walk straight into the hope God offers us in Jesus.

Jesus granted her request. She was bold to hope and blessed to receive. We too, can come to God boldly, without hesitation or fear, believing that God in Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, is alive and at work in our lives no matter how dark and gloomy the present situation appears. The promises are there for us. Everyone is included. We can sit at the table where there will be more than crumbs! Let us be bold to hope and blessed to receive.

Amen.