

SERMON FOR AUGUST 20, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 15: 21-28

THEME: MERCY

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." **24** He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." **26** And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." **27** She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." **28** Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

In the name of Jesus:

Have you ever felt moved by someone else's misery that you felt sick to your stomach? Your child hospitalized and not knowing what the future may hold? A son or daughter suffering from a great amount of stress, and you feel utterly helpless in giving them assistance? Or perhaps you have received bad news at work or in your family that is causing you stress, so much so that it is affecting your physical health? Well, if so, you can relate to the Canaanite woman in our text for today!

There is good news in our Gospel lesson today, but that Good News isn't found in the woman from Canaan. This poor woman was one of "those people," the Jews would say of this woman that she wasn't their kind of people. We

learn in the Gospel of Mark that she was a Syrophenician woman, she lived in the land that rightly belonged to the Israelites as designated by God as a part of their inheritance when they arrived in the Promised Land long ago. She and her people were pagans, they worshiped idols. From the Old Testament we learn how despicable the Canaanite religion was, they married people from other religions, and they participated in detestable religious rites, including child sacrifice. From Matthew's point of view, this woman was religious scum, the Jewish rabbis would consider this woman an enemy of God and so sinful she should be treated like a dog. That is why the Jews referred to the Canaanites as dogs, they were enemies of the living God, unclean, from the wrong side of the tracks, nothing more than a scavenger picking through the neighbor's garbage looking for something to eat. She was disgusting, hopeless, with nowhere to turn and nowhere to go. She had everything stacked against her, her origin, religion, culture, ethnicity, and sex.

And here she comes to Jesus, at the end of her rope. She is literally sick to her stomach over the condition of her daughter. Her daughter had an unclean spirit, and no physician, no priest, no one from her neighborhood or religion could help her daughter. This mother is unable to help the one person who means the most to her. But she heard about this person named Jesus, who did great miracles. He had fed thousands, even raised the dead.

Could He help? In her mind, there was nowhere else to turn. And so she sought out Jesus, hearing that He not only was in town but also at a certain place, at a certain address. She is sick to her stomach over the condition of her daughter, Matthew tells us that she was demon possessed. The woman finds the address, enters the house, and falls at Jesus' feet.

Her prayer is a simple prayer, a powerful prayer, it is probably the most powerful prayer anyone of us can pray. Listen to her prayer: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; Lord, help me." Her cry was a cry for mercy. She didn't deserve what she was asking for, neither did her daughter. She pleaded to the Lord of all of creation to look upon her and her daughter and have mercy. That Jesus would have undeserved love and pity and to be so moved to grant her request so that healing would come to her daughter.

All she knew about Jesus is that Jesus loved people, that He loved sinners, that He was One who delighted in mercy. Perhaps this woman heard what Moses wrote in the book of Deuteronomy: "For the Lord your God is a merciful God." (4: 31). Or maybe she heard what Daniel wrote "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy." (9:18).

This is who God is, it is what He is like, it is His nature to have mercy and be merciful. Jesus, who is God in the flesh, is by His very nature merciful and

loves to show mercy to those in need. The Jews understood mercy to be an emotional response to someone in need. To be merciful is to feel so deeply the pain of someone else that you are bound and determined to do something about it. Matthew wrote about Jesus earlier and said, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sickness." (14:14). Jesus felt sick to His stomach over what He saw and the needs of the large crowd.

Jesus has had compassion on you. He is merciful to you. Mercy can be thought of as good will toward someone who is afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them of their affliction. This is what Jesus has done for you! Jesus saw your need and went into action. Mercy is meaningless without action. Looking down from heaven, Jesus was sick at heart knowing that your sins have separated you from the Father. . So, at the Father's command, Jesus was sent by the Father down to be born of the Virgin Mary. He set aside His glory for a time to be like you, to purchase and win you from sin, Satan, and death, with His holy and precious blood, His innocent suffering the death. You, who were an outsider, lost and condemned in your transgressions and sins have been made His child in Holy Baptism. He has seen you in your lost and condemned state and suffered Hell for you so that He would not spend an eternity without you.

The Lord is merciful to you in His Son Jesus. He has shown you His mercy and love and showers you with His love, forgiveness, and help in time of need. The Canaanite woman sought merciful crumbs from the Master's table, but instead Jesus gives not crumbs but a banqueting feast. Jesus comes to you this day to give you Himself, offering to you feast upon His very body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine so that you might taste, see, and experience the love and mercy of the Lord.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll once said, "Mercy is God's ministry to the miserable." Our Lord Jesus is merciful, and invites each of us to come to Him for mercy. When telling the story of the rich man and the tax collector, Jesus commended the tax collector, who beat his breast and looked to heaven praying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This tax collector asked for mercy, and he received mercy. Today in the kyrie you have also asked for mercy, singing Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord and mercy. And the Lord has had mercy and continues to have mercy upon you.

Time and again God has been merciful and gracious to His people. The Psalms are filled with examples and requests for God's mercy. "You are my God, save your servant who trusts in you. Have mercy on me O Lord for I call to you all day long. I have trusted in your mercy, I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all

the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let your mercy be upon us as our trust is in You. For great is your mercy into the heavens. For you are good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy to all who call upon you. For the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, He has not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards us.

So dear friend, in times of trouble and despair, do not lose hope! Your God loves you and is your ever present Help in your times of trouble! He sent His Son Jesus to be that Help. So hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy for you, in the name of Jesus. And be an agent of God's mercy to others. Freely you have received His mercy, so now freely give it to others. "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen