

Sermon

Pentecost 11, Year A

Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just 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." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting 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." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Invocation:

Come Holy Spirit and help us to speak gently, with kindness and patience, to those who speak to us with power and with wrong intentions.

Help us to speak of hope and to live our lives in hope. Forgive us when we speak without listening. Help us to be a light in the darkness. --Amen

Sermon:

Merriam-Webster's dictionary says that

a "vignette" is "a short descriptive literary sketch".

Today's Gospel, about Jesus and the Canaanite lady,
is one vignette, taken from a long string of vignettes.

All of the vignettesⁱ in Matthew's Gospel,
were preached by Jesus over a few days' time.

Jesus was a very, very busy guy.

If we stand back and look at the overall theme of Jesus' Vignettes,
we might conclude that he wanted to make three points:

1. I am God's Son, the Messiah.
2. I am also, God.
3. Your Faith really matters.

Most of us who claim to be Christians,
are comfortable with the first 2 points.

It's the 3rd point, *about faith*, which is hard.

We've been working on Matthew's Gospel for a while now.

A few weeks ago, we heard Jesus and his disciples walking
In the hilly countryside near Lake Gennesaret,
followed by a large crowd of friends,
enemies, admirers and the curious.
Everywhere that Jesus goes, there's a crowd.

While Jesus was teaching them with parables
about the Kingdom of Heaven, down here on earth,
King Herod beheaded Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist.

When Jesus tried to slip away from the crowd to pray,
they followed him. The crowd hung around.

By late afternoon everyone was hungry.
Jesus fed 5,000 men, plus women and children,
with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish.

After dinner, Jesus told his guys, "I am out of here".
He took off to pray, looked over his shoulder and said
"You guys row to the other side of Lake Gennesaret".

He must have thought, but he didn't say,
"I'll catch up with you guys later."

Lake Gennesaret is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide.

Rowing across is no small feat. It was late in the day.

But Peter and his crew started anyway.

Those guys had a lot more faith than we give them credit for!

But, of course, a storm came, and the waves got big and scary.

So, Jesus walked out to them and said: "Don't be afraid."

Next morning, Jesus and his crew were somewhere
near Tyre and Sidon.

Back then that area was also known
as the "Land of Canaan".

The Canaanites and Israel fought over that region for centuries.

But then the Romans came, and said,

"Don't bother, you guys. It's ours, now"!

Even though Jesus and his guys were in hostile territory,

There was another huge crowd.

The Prince of Peace could find no peace!

Jesus must have wondered: "Can't the Son of God get a break?"ⁱⁱ

Anyway, as they are walking along, a woman jumps up and yells:

“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is tormented by a demon.”

Even though Jesus heard her,
it seems like he was totally beat. So, he didn't say a thing.

His disciples were cranky, too and they said to Jesus,
“Tell her to get lost”.

But, just then, Jesus - being Jesus -
saw something the others didn't see.

So, he took a deep breath Jesus and said to the lady:
“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
“Sorry, you're not the kind of person I'm supposed to save.”

But the lady's daughter was tormented by demon, and
she wasn't about to give up! “Lord, help me”, she said.

Jesus, weirdly says right back,
“I'm not supposed to throw the children's food *to the dogs.*”

What the heck? Did *our* Jesus -- the Prince of Peace --
call that lady a DOG?

Well, you know me.

I checked the Greek.

Jesus didn't actually say "dogs".

The Greek word for "dogs" is Kyon. Κῦων.

Jesus actually said Kynarion (κυνάριον).

That's the Greek word for "*Puppies*".ⁱⁱⁱ

So, what seemed like a really harsh story, about a very mean Jesus,
Isn't really so bad.

I imagine Jesus looked at the Canaanite lady, with a smile and said:

"You remind me of a lost puppy, begging for a crumb."

And that's why the woman said to Jesus,

"Yes, Lord ... even a puppy eats the crumbs
that fall from her masters' table."

I know that you are worn out Jesus,

but my daughter is really sick, and only you can fix her.

And so, Jesus of Nazareth, the Great I AM,

spoke to her softly and said

"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done..."

The lady got her crumb. Jesus cured her daughter.

All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided—

So, it was then. And so, it is now.

AMEN.

ⁱ Which we sometimes also call parables.

ⁱⁱ I wonder if Jesus was ever tempted to stay home, get married and build tables and chairs.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's OK to say, "Aww", right now!