

The Second Sunday in Lent – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 15:21-28: “A Faithful Dog Keeps Its Eyes on Its Master.”
February 28/March 1, 2026 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Jesus, our Savior divine, how can we ever thank You for bringing us to the true and saving faith! Help us never to doubt but firmly to believe, no matter how great our trials or how distant Your help may appear. Grant us true humility, asking nothing because of any merit or worthiness on our part, but trusting only in Your Word and promise. Whether in joy or sorrow, teach us to believe and to say that You have done all things well. Amen. (*Meditations on the Gospels*, CPH 2009, p. 301)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

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 was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” / 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.” / 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 right 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 masters’ 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. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who promises that whoever comes to Him, He will never cast out (Joh. 6:37), dear fellow redeemed:

Jesus had not entered the Gentile district of Tyre and Sidon to interact with the locals or to gather a crowd. On the contrary, the evangelist Mark reported that “*he entered a house and did not want anyone to know*” (7:24). The Canaanite woman who came looking for Him would have noticed that He was not looking to be seen or talked to. So what made her pursue Him so relentlessly?

There were two reasons: her daughter was severely oppressed by a demon, and she believed that Jesus could heal her. We don’t know how long the demon had afflicted her daughter or how it affected her. But obviously no one else had been able to help. What made her think that Jesus could succeed when all others had failed?

The answer is in the way she addressed Him: “*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David,*” she said. She was confessing that Jesus was the promised Messiah descended from David’s line. She had obviously heard about Jesus, what He had taught and the miracles He had done. On the basis of

these reports, she believed that He was the true God in the flesh. That's why she knew He could help her daughter, just as He had helped many others throughout Judea and Galilee.

When the Canaanite woman followed after Jesus crying for His mercy, at first He said nothing to her, absolutely nothing. He certainly gave the impression that He wasn't interested in hearing her troubles. But He didn't say "no." The woman kept asking. She begged for His help again and again, so much so, that the disciples grew tired of her cries. Now they begged Jesus to send her away, so they could have some peace. Jesus' reply? "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*" meaning the Jews and not the Gentiles. That still wasn't a "no."

Now she fell down on her knees right in front of Jesus and said, "*Lord, help me.*" She would not be ignored, and she was not going to leave until Jesus ordered her to. He did not do this. Instead, He used an analogy for what He said before, that He was sent for the Jews: "*It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*" The "*children's bread*" is the salvation God had chosen His people Israel to taste and see. The Israelites had the Holy Scriptures. They knew the promise of a Savior. They had been waiting for its fulfillment. Why should the Gentiles have the same gift when they had rejected the true God for so long?

Jesus said it was neither good nor right to take bread from the children—the Jews—and throw it to the dogs—the Gentiles. It sounded kind of harsh, but even that wasn't a hard "no." Far from being put off by what Jesus said, the woman seized on His words as an invitation: "*Yes, Lord, what You say is true. We Gentiles don't deserve to have what the Jews have. I know I don't deserve Your mercy, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.*" "I'm not asking to be treated like the children," she said. "I'm just happy to have the crumbs that fall on the floor, because even the crumbs from You, O Lord, Son of David, are more than enough!"

What an expression of faith! What dogged confidence in Jesus! What kept her coming? Why didn't she give up when Jesus acted so disinterested? Well if she walked away, her daughter would still be severely oppressed by a demon. Besides that, she knew who Jesus was, the promised Messiah. She wasn't going to leave the only One who could help. This is what Peter said when other disciples of Jesus were leaving because His teaching offended them. Jesus asked the Twelve, "*Do you want to go away as well?*" (Joh. 6:67). Simon Peter replied, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*" (vv. 68-69).

Those "*words of eternal life*" from our Lord are what strengthen our faith and give us hope in the difficult times. God also uses the trials themselves to test our faith, refine it, and exercise it, so that our focus on Him is sharpened. That's what happened with the Canaanite woman. Her tremendous difficulties with her daughter did not crush her faith; these challenges made her faith stronger. She wouldn't have gone looking for Jesus if everything in her life was going well. But she did when she was suffering. Then when she found Jesus, His behavior toward her might have seemed uncaring, but it caused her to be even more persistent and cling more tightly to Him.

Why does a parent take an extra step away from the wall of the pool when a little child is getting ready to jump in? It is to increase the child's trust: "Don't worry, I will catch you. I will keep you safe." That's what Jesus says to us when the distance from here to there looks too far, when we can't imagine surviving another health setback, when giving up a particular sin requires too much

sacrifice, when the consequences for saying “no” to the crowd are too painful. “Don’t worry,” says Jesus, “I will catch you. I will keep you safe.”

But is it true? Has the Lord caught you when you had to take a leap of faith? Did He bless you and keep you and give you peace in your times of greatest difficulty? Have you emerged from those trials stronger or weaker? Perhaps you’re not sure. Our perception about these things is often affected by our expectation. If our expectation is that we should never have to suffer or experience hardships, but that life should go about how we plan, then our perception will almost certainly be that God has failed us. He didn’t keep us from pain.

But if we accept what Jesus says, *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (Joh. 16:33), then we will not go looking for trials, but we also won’t be taken by surprise when they come. And when troubles do come, God promises to work through them for our good. That’s what Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* He says He will turn every trial, every heartache, pain, and sorrow into blessings for us somehow. We don’t always figure out just what those blessings are, but we trust that this is true.

The woman might not have perceived a blessing in the way Jesus seemed to avoid her and put her off. But that all changed when Jesus said, *“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire,”* and she returned home to a daughter healed. This woman is a tremendous example for us. We learn from her what to do when our suffering is intense, when the Lord seems to be ignoring us or seems to be punishing us, when we feel no better than a despised dog. She kept her eyes on Jesus. No matter how He responded (or didn’t respond) to her cries, no matter what she experienced, she kept crying out for His mercy and help. Like Jacob wrestling with God, she would not let her Lord go unless He blessed her (Gen. 32:26).

Her faith in Him was not disappointed. Faith in Jesus never is. Faith ties you to Him. It connects you to Him who is Love incarnate, who took on your flesh to redeem you from sin and death, who covers you in His righteousness. The woman was right that the crumbs of His grace are more than enough. But Jesus gives you more than crumbs. He gives His grace in abundance through His holy Word and Sacraments, so that every sin of weakness and doubt is forgiven, and you are given the strength you need to go forward and endure.

So we come here like dogs who expect good things from their good Master. We keep our eyes trained on Him, we listen to what He says, and we want to please Him by what we do. Sometimes He will make us wait for something in order to teach us patience and trust. But then He opens His hand and gives us everything we need. He feeds us with His body and blood as we kneel before Him at the Communion rail. He assures us that He forgives all of our sins, and that He is well pleased with us.

Though it didn’t seem like it at first, Jesus loved that Canaanite woman. If He wanted to get rid of her, He could have. But He wanted her to keep crying out, keep pursuing, keep begging, until the time was right to grant her request. Jesus loves you in the same way. He wants you to follow Him and not get discouraged when your troubles don’t go away as quickly as you would like. He hears all your cries, and He promises that at the right time, He will grant your request, or He will continue to strengthen you in the struggle.

The faithful woman gladly embraced Jesus' reference to the family dog waiting at the side of the table. We can do the same. Not only are we Gentiles like she was, but we know that Jesus came to save us, too, and has abundant grace to help in our times of need. We don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to get ourselves out of all our troubles. Like a pet that is well-cared for by its master, we know our merciful Lord will care for us.

So we keep our eyes fixed on Him. We do not give up, even when it seems like He isn't listening. We hold Him to His promise that He will have mercy upon us. Because He does, and He will.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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