

## Matthew 15:21–28

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!” <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, “Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us.” <sup>24</sup>He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, “Lord, help me.” <sup>26</sup> He answered her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to their little dogs.” <sup>27</sup>“Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.” And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

Sermon for Pentecost 13, August 30, 2020 St. Paul’s Green Garden, MI

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

theme: “Take the Journey of Faith”

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

Water is sprinkled. The name of the Triune God is spoken. The child’s life of faith begins. But the infant doesn’t know that this is only the beginning of a journey of faith with God. Christian parents have a very important responsibility to help the child on his journey so that he continues on the path that began at his baptism.

He will enroll in Sunday School, then confirmation class. By God’s grace he will learn more about God’s word as he studies it with fellow Christians. At times during his life he may experience sorrow, as life takes unexpected turns. A loved one may die. The child who was baptized a Christian may have his faith tested as he loses a job or suffers a setback in school. He will probably marry and then it will be his responsibility to help his children on their journey of faith.

This journey of faith can be a bumpy road even for those who have been raised as Christians. Imagine what it must be like for those who have not been born into a God-fearing family and only later in life come in contact with the Word of the living God. That is how it must have been for this Canaanite woman whom Jesus encountered near the heathen stronghold of Tyre and Sidon along the coast of Phoenicia. What a journey it was for her and her faith and she learned to trust in Jesus more deeply. Any one and everyone who takes the journey of faith will find the very same thing that this woman found as she came face to face with Jesus. 1.

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There will be ruts in the road 2. We learn we can't go on by ourselves. 3. Believe that Jesus will see you to the end of the road.

One thing becomes clear from the beginning of this account. This woman was a gentile. She came from the region around Tyre and Sidon, the home of the infamous Old Testament unbeliever we know as Jezebel the wife of King Ahab. The people who lived in this area during Jesus' time must have worshiped the same false gods as Jezebel and Ahab did. So most likely this woman had been raised in a heathen home. She did not grow up knowing or believing in the true God. So where did she begin her journey of faith and HOW did it begin? We don't know for scripture does not give us those details.

Somehow, God in his mercy to her, caused her to learn about him and about the promise of the Savior. Perhaps she had some Israelite friends who told her about the one who would come to save the world from sin. She had probably heard about Jesus and his amazing miracles of healing. We know that she called him "Lord, Son of David" and she pleaded for his mercy on her and especially her daughter. It is interesting that she knew that term for Jesus and used it. Obviously, her journey of faith had taken her down a path she had never expected to travel. She had made the very long journey from her heathen beginnings to faith in the true God.

But now she was going to encounter some rough places in the road, places full of ruts. The travel was not going to be easy. Jesus said that the path to eternal life is narrow. This woman found that it is also bumpy. She probably married and now had a daughter by the time she learned of Jesus. It must have been a very difficult thing for her to watch happen, but she learned about the power of Satan. Again, we have no idea of the circumstances here. But we do know that Satan was trying desperately to exert his power at the time Jesus was on earth. It happened that a demon physically possessed the body of this woman's daughter. The girl was suffering immensely because of the demonic activity. From other incidents in scripture we know that those who were possessed would sometimes be thrown into fires or be flung to the ground or engage in other self-destructive behavior. This woman could not watch this go on any longer.

Was she going to despair, or would she look for help her journey may have been a long one. It certainly was bumpy and full of ruts. But finally she came to the understanding that she needed to go to the true God for help. When she heard about Jesus she believed that he was the one who could and would help her. Even though it was difficult, God was allowing her to experience the ruts on her journey of faith. It was his purpose to bring her on this journey to help her see HIS power and her need for him even more clearly.

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As God's children you and I need not think of ruts in the road as something bad. God cares so deeply for you and about your life with him that he will allow you to experience certain bumps in the road that are designed for you. He WILL set ruts in your path because they are good for you. Who of us likes to think that we need to have our faith strengthened? But think about this: Can your faith ever be TOO strong? Another important point for us to remember is that just because things seem to be going fine in our lives does not mean we don't need to have our faith strengthened. What sinful pride we show when we think that our faith doesn't need to be made stronger, "So please, Lord, don't let me come to any bumpy spots in the road." When our Lord, in his mighty wisdom sees that we need a stronger faith and brings us on that journey, who are we to question him? He will see that our faith is strengthened because perhaps he is preparing us for an important task he has in mind for us. Who knows how much the Lord had in store for this woman that the bible doesn't even tell us about.

Imagine that you are traveling along the highway. You are in the middle of nowhere, on a deserted part of the highway when you get a flat tire. That circumstance would be difficult enough. But then you find that even though you have a spare, you don't have jack or a tire iron. Now you're helpless. You can't go on, what are you going to do? This woman was in a spiritual circumstance on her journey of faith that caused her to learn that she could not go on by herself. She needed the power of the true God for help.

How helpless this woman was. We hear the desperation in her words: "**Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!**" This woman knew she was helpless before the power of this demon. Even though her previous spiritual life had likely been spent serving false gods and she had perhaps seen Satan's power before. Now his terrible power became real and it was affecting her dear daughter. How was she suffering? We don't know. Very likely the demon was abusing her mentally and emotionally. No matter what it was, this woman came to the realization that she could not continue on this journey of faith by herself.

She had to go to Jesus. When she heard that he was in her region she knew that if she went to him, he would understand her situation. What kind of physical journey did she have to make just to get to see Jesus? Did she have to get someone to stay with her daughter while she made the trip? How would the demon abuse the daughter while the mother was away? Did her heathen relatives or friends laugh at her for being so desperate that she had to go to this Jewish prophet who probably couldn't help her anyway? It didn't matter anymore. She believed Jesus was her

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only hope. She could not make this journey of faith by herself any longer. She needed Jesus.

Have you ever tried to travel an unknown highway without a map, without provisions of food, water and proper clothing? Common sense requires that you take proper precautions and have the proper equipment when you are traveling. And in a spiritual sense, how useless for us to try to go on by ourselves without Jesus. So back to the flat tire situation for a moment. Suppose you figure out a way to get the car axle up off the ground far enough to get the flat tire off and the spare tire on. And what would you do? You or I would probably be patting ourselves on the back for our ingenuity in getting out of a tough spot. And we so often forget that it is still the Lord who gives us the intelligence to overcome situations like this, and who placed just the right materials at our disposal or who caused just the right person to come along at just the right time so that you weren't stranded in bad weather or overnight, for a long period of time.

So often we allow our spiritual life to deteriorate. Aren't there times when we act as if we can go on in life without God, without regular spiritual nourishment from his word to strengthen us on our journey of faith with him? How can you and I go through this life without regular assurance from our Lord that he forgives our wickedness and remembers our sins NO MORE?! That is the real strength we need for our journey of faith. When you know and believe that God forgives you, then you come to know that Jesus will see you to the end of the road.

Jesus really tested this woman's faith. When she came to him pleading he as much as acted as though he had not heard her. This must have shocked her at first. Here was this Jesus whom she had heard healed so many people, but he was refusing to answer her? How could this be? Surely he did not want to see her daughter suffer. But this woman kept walking with Jesus.

Then he told her that she was not the right nationality for him. He had been sent only to help the people of Israel. He could not be bothered with her. Yet he had healed other foreigners, such as the slave of the Roman centurion. Why would he not heal her daughter? Yet she did not give up. She walking the road of faith with Jesus.

Finally, Jesus told her, "How can you expect me to take bread out of the mouths of the children and toss it to their dogs." Such an insult, saying that she was nothing better than a pet dog. Of course, Jesus was saying, how can I do for you what I am supposed to be doing for the chosen people of Israel? I have to give the gospel first to my own people, the people to whom I was sent. How could she expect him to give attention to foreigners when the need was so great among his own people? You see how Jesus was testing her faith? He was actually bringing

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her along the journey of faith. And even though this woman may have been discouraged, she never doubted Jesus' power and she truly believed that he would use it for her daughter's good. So when Jesus called her a dog, she did not walk away in disgust. She continued the journey of faith.

She said to Jesus, "I know I am not a Jew. I know I don't deserve to have anything from you. But just like the dogs lick up crumbs from under their master's table, could you not simply do this small thing for me? Won't you please release my daughter from the power of this demon and stop her suffering? All I'm asking for is a few crumbs." And just like the centurion who clung to Jesus' mercy for his servant this woman also clung to Jesus for his mercy. She believed Jesus would grant mercy to her and her daughter. And now we see Jesus' purpose. He really DID want to grant her request. He knew that during the rest of her journey of faith she was likely to experience disappointment and roadblocks, but he wanted her to know that he was always there for her and that despite setbacks he would always help her. Her persistence did not go unrewarded. She received exactly what she had prayed for. Jesus really is the loving master that he had heard so much about.

You see how this woman had every imaginable roadblock placed in her way. Yet she continued to trust in Jesus. He was even the one who seemed to place the roadblocks in her way. Most of us don't like the delays caused by road construction. There are obstacles, roads are re-routed and the slow down of traffic is annoying. But stop to think of what those delays mean. In the end there will be better highways that will move traffic more quickly and hopefully more safely. In the same way, Jesus doesn't mean that an illness, or a business failure, or losing a job, or a change of job will bring your life to a complete standstill. What he wants us to remember is that we need to trust him to carry out his good purpose. He will see us through to the end of the road and his HOLY DESIRES will be carried out. Always be assured that Jesus lets you experience those turns in the road because he loves you.

How will you walk the road of faith? Will you walk with your head down, worried and apprehensive of what is around the corner? Will you walk, unsure of your Savior's love for you? No, instead walk with complete certainty that Jesus is by your side, walking with you, both along the bumpy parts of the road as well as during the happy times where the road is smooth. No matter where you are on the journey of faith, remember, your Savior walks with you every step of the way. Amen.